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FAME AND FORTUNE

STORIES OF BOYS **WEEKLY** WHO MAKE MONEY.

STRANDED OUT WEST; OR, THE BOY WHO FOUND A SILVER MINE.

By A SELF-MADE MAN.



"Now then," cried Hurley, shaking his fist at the helpless boy, "tell us the location of that mine or we'll throw you into the ravine." Joe saw that his predicament was a desperate one, for the ruffians were thoroughly in earnest.

Fame and Fortune Weekly

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY

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Stranded Out West

OR,

"THE BOY WHO FOUND A SILVER MINE

By A SELF-MADE MAN

CHAPTER I.

STRANDED.

"So yer stranded, are ye?" said the landlord of the Hathaway Hotel, a roughly-constructed, two-story building situated about the center of the single street of Silver Creek, but which, nevertheless, was the most imposing specimen of architecture in that bustling little Western mining town.

"Yes, sir; I'm flat broke," replied the stalwart, good-looking boy who stood in front of the bar in the main room of the hotel.

"How came yer to be busted?" asked Bug Hathaway, curiously, noting the fact that the youth seemed unusually intelligent, and quite above the ordinary specimens of hard luck that floated around that section occasionally.

"I was held up yesterday afternoon as I was riding along the road to Jordan by three rough-looking men with rifles. They took my horse, my saddlebags, my revolver, and cleaned out my pockets. Then they let me go."

"Ye must have run up ag'in some of the Hurley gang."

"What do you mean by the Hurley gang?" asked the boy.

"Hain't yer heard about them?"

The youth shook his head.

"They're desperadoes and horse thieves. They've given the sheriff of this county all kinds of trouble, and the men they've killed would start a very respectable graveyard if collected together. Ye were lucky to git off with yer life. Generally they don't leave no witnesses to carry tales around these diggin's. Where do yer hail from?"

"Denver."

"And what brought yer to Silver Creek?"
"Nothing in particular. Just drifted in here after I lost my way."

"What's your name?"
"Joe Rushmore."
"Hungry, I s'pose?"
"Very. I haven't eaten anything since yesterday noon You see I carried some grub in my saddlebags, but that went with the rest."

"I see. If I give ye a meal are yer willin' to work out the price?"

"Try me," replied the boy, cheerfully.
"I will. Come with me."
He walked toward a rear door and Rushmore followed him.

They entered the dining room of the hotel, which was furnished with a long table built of planed plank covered with shiny oilcloth, and fringed at regular intervals with plates, cups and saucers, knives, forks and spoons, while three cruet-stands stood in the center and at either end.

A good-looking girl was filling several sugar bowls at a small table near a window overlooking a section of yard.

"Sit down," said the landlord, pointing at the end seat of the table, and Joe took possession of the chair. "Maggie," continued Mr. Hathaway, addressing the girl, "get this boy somethin' to eat. When yer done," he added, turning to the boy, "ye kin see me out at the bar. I'll give yer somethin' to do."

"All right, sir," replied Rushmore. "Much obliged for giving me the chance to earn a meal."

"Ye are welcome," replied the landlord, walking away. The girl presently returned with a plate of cold meat, sliced, some bread and butter, and a jug of milk.

"This is the best I can do for you," she said. "Dinner won't be ready for an hour or more."

"Thanks," replied Joe, "it's first-class. When a fellow hasn't eaten in about twenty-four hours he is thankful for anything in the shape of grub."

"Haven't you had anything to eat in that time?" the girl asked, in some surprise.

"Not a bite," replied Joe, as he attacked the meat and bread with a voraciousness that proved his words.

"How is that?"

Joe explained how he had been cleaned out by the three rascals on the road to Jordan; how he had then lost his way on foot during the night, and how he had just wandered into Silver Creek, feeling pretty rocky.

"That was too bad," said the girl, sympathetically. "I'll get you more meat and bread, and half of a pie."

She hastened to do so.

"You'll be able to get work in the mines hereabouts," said the girl, encouragingly. "The pay is good. The superintendent of the Crescent Leasing Company lives here. You can speak to him when he comes to dinner."

"I will," answered Joe. "I've got to do something to get another start."

"You're from the East, aren't you?"

"Yes. I was born in Buffalo. I came out to Denver on what proved to be a wild goose chase. A man in Denver gave me a letter to a mine owner near Jordan, who, he said, wanted a general assistant in the office of his smelter. That's what brought me out this way. Now the letter is gone, and with it everything else I owned in the world, and I'm down to hard-pan. By the time I earn enough to take me out of this town I s'pose the job at Jordan will have been captured by somebody else, so you see I'm in rather hard luck all around."

"I'm sorry for you," replied the girl. "You're cut out for something better than a mine laborer, I can see that. It's hard work, but you look strong enough to stand it till you get on your feet again."

"I'm not afraid of work," replied the boy, resolutely. "Very few people get something for nothing in this world. At any rate I don't expect to find a sinecure. I don't believe there are any floating around this part of the country."

He finished the last of the milk, and having cleaned up all the bread and meat, he rose from the table, feeling like a new boy, and went out into the barroom to see what the landlord had for him to do.

"I reckon you're pretty handy at writin' and cipherin'?" said Bug Hathaway, in a tone that implied he had little doubt what the boy's answer would be.

"Yes, sir. I'm well up in all that," replied Joe, with alacrity.

"Enough said. I want you to go over this here account book of mine and kinder straighten it out. Write down on a paper what's comin' to me from the people whose names is writ in the book. There's a misunderstandin' between me and several of 'em, and as they're all good customers I want to fix the matter right. If there's anythin' yer don't understand, jest ask me and I'll 'lucidate it."

"All right, sir."

"As I reckon it may take yer some time, ye kin go into dinner when it's ready. In addition I'll give ye yer supper and breakfast to-morrer, and a shakedown to-night somewhere about the house. That's fair, ain't it?"

"Yes, sir, that's fair enough if I do enough work to earn all that."

"Never you mind about that. It's worth that to have my accounts fixed up keyrect, whether it takes yer an hour or the hull afternoon to do it. To-morrer maybe I kin find somethin' else for yer to do. At any rate, I kin get yer a job at the mines as a laborer, where ye kin make enough to carry yer out of town."

Joe was established at the upper end of the bar with pen, ink, paper and Mr. Hathaway's account book, and he started to dig the various items out and arrange them in methodical order.

With the proprietor's occasional assistance Joe made good progress.

"I'll allow that a good eddication stands by a man when he needs it," remarked Mr. Hathaway, during an interval when customers were scarce. "I ain't had much schoolin' myself, not that I feel the loss of it much except in a case like this. How long did you go to school yourself?"

"Several years. I graduated from the Buffalo Grammar School and then went to work. I should liked to have gone to the High School, but my mother died and I was thrown on my own resources."

Here a couple of the inhabitants came in for a drink and a chat with the landlord, and nothing more was said about schooling.

Joe went in for dinner when everybody else was through, and he ate with the man cook and three women servants of the house.

The girls were quite taken by the boy's good looks and cheerful conversation, and they said they hoped he would remain in the neighborhood for awhile.

After the meal Joe returned to his job and finished it in about an hour.

The landlord declared he had acquitted himself in fine style.

"Ye had better take a look around town now, Rushmore," he said. "Ye might pick up a job in one of the stores before supper. If yer don't I'll see about gettin' yer took on at one of the mines to-morrer."

Joe put on his hat and went out.

There was no danger of his getting lost in Silver Creek.

It had but one long thoroughfare, and all byways led into it.

There was a bank, an assay office, a post-office, a couple of other hotels besides Mr. Hathaway's, saloons by the score, with gambling rooms attached, vaudeville stages, and stores for the sale of everything that was in demand in that locality.

Joe made inquiries in several likely places, but there was no opening for him.

Finally he reached the end of the street and walked out toward the mining district.

At a lonesome part of the foothills he saw a burro wandering about nibbling the few blades of grass that sprouted among the stones, and close by, perceived a weary-looking

old man, who looked like a miner or prospector, sitting on a flat boulder looking the picture of desolation.

CHAPTER II.

HEIR TO A SILVER MINE.

Joe looked hard at the stranger, and the man returned his stare.

"Say, pardner," said the derelict, "will you do me a favor?"

"Sure, I will," replied Joe, cheerfully.

"I'm about petered out. This is the first time in twenty years I've felt the need of a doctor. I'm sick, and I can't get away from the fact. I want you to help me reach some place in Silver Creek where I can put up. I've gone as far as I can alone. Just catch that burro, help me on his back, and walk with me to town, and I'll make it worth your while. If I stay here an hour longer I'll turn up my toes."

"I'll do that for you," said Joe.

The animal permitted the boy to take him in charge and lead him to his owner.

"What's your name, pardner? Mine is Zeke Thompson."

"My name is Joe Rushmore."

"I knew a Henry Rushmore thirty years or so ago when I lived in Buffalo. He was a carpenter. He loaned me \$100 to start West with."

"My father's name was Henry Rushmore, and he was a carpenter. We lived in Buffalo."

"Your father must be the man I mean. I never paid him that \$100. Is he alive?"

"No. He died three years ago."

"I s'pose your mother is alive?" said the prospector.

"No," answered Joe, sadly. "She died this spring."

"You don't say! Strange I should meet you away out here. Are you working in the mines?"

"No. I only arrived here this morning."

"Only this morning," he muttered.

He said nothing more for some little time, during which the burro jogged slowly along the wagon trail, and Joe kept pace with it.

Several times the man groaned as if suffering great pain, and the look on his face was not encouraging.

He appeared to be growing weaker, and Joe had to support him on the animal's back.

After a while his mind seemed to wander, and the boy heard him talking about silver ore worth millions.

At length they struck the town, much to Joe's relief, for he had all he could do to hold the man on the burro.

The inhabitants looked at them curiously as the boy led the way to Hathaway's Hotel.

He tied the burro to a post and helped the man into the saloon.

Placing Zeke Thompson in a chair he interviewed the landlord, telling him the circumstances of the case.

"This here ain't no house of rest for dead broke prospectors," remarked Mr. Hathaway. "If he's got the price he kin stay, if he hasn't he'd better move on."

"He can't move on. He's a sick man and needs a doctor," protested Joe.

"The doctor runs the drug-store next to the post-office. You'd better take him there."

"I don't believe he can walk that far."

As if to prove that Joe was right, the derelict at that moment collapsed in his chair, and the boy had to rush over to catch him to prevent him falling to the floor.

Mr. Hathaway didn't fancy his visitor, and he was put out with Joe for bringing the man to his house.

In order to revive him so he could move on he poured out some spirits in a glass and brought it over to Thompson.

He got enough down the prospector's throat to fetch him around.

"Where am I?" muttered the stranger.

"You're at Hathaway's Hotel in Silver Creek," said Joe.

"I want to go to bed and I want a doctor," he mumbled.

"Can yer pay for a room? If so, ye kin have it," said the landlord, in a business tone.

Thompson fumbled in his pocket and brought out some bills.

"That's all I have," he said, faintly. "Take it and help me."

The landlord counted the money.

He kept half and handed the rest to the stranger.

The bills fell from his listless hand and Joe picked them up.

"If you have him put to bed I'll get the doctor for him," the boy said.

"Enough said," replied Mr. Hathaway.

He called up a man who was sweeping the barroom, and between them they carried Zeke Thompson to a room on the next floor and put him to bed.

While they were doing this Joe rushed off for the doctor.

He found the physician behind the counter of his store talking mining matters with an acquaintance.

"You're wanted at Hathaway's Hotel to attend a sick man," said Joe.

"What's the matter with him?" asked the doctor.

"I couldn't tell you. All I know is that he's pretty bad."

The physician said he'd be right over and Joe returned to the hotel.

The landlord was behind the bar.

"We put the old chap to bed. I guess he's pretty sick. Looks to me as if he might pass in his checks any moment. I left my man mindin' him. Is the doctor comin' over?"

"Yes," replied Joe.

"Where did you pick him up?" asked Mr. Hathaway, curiously.

"About a mile out of town."

"How came you to fetch him here?"

"He said he was sick and wanted to see a doctor. I saw that he was in a bad way, and might die if left by himself in that lonely spot, so I helped him into town."

"Not on foot?"

"No, he had a burro. It's tied outside."

"Then you'd better take it around to the yard and put it in the stable."

"All right," replied Joe.

"Hold on a moment. Did you ask him his name?"

"Yes. He said it was Zeke Thompson."

"Then write it in my registry book so that I kin keep track of him. I took out a week's board and lodgin' from his money. Jest mark that down, too."

"How much?" asked Joe.

"Ten dollars."

"I've got the rest of his money, so I'll pay the doctor," said the boy.

He then went outside and looked after the burro.

When he got back the landlord told him the doctor was upstairs with Thompson.

Joe went up to see if he could be of any use.

Thompson had been a friend of his father's in the old days, and he believed that it was his duty to befriend the old prospector as far as he was able.

The doctor told Joe that Thompson had acute pneumonia with complications.

He did not think his patient would survive the night.

"Come over to the drug-store and I will give you some medicine for him. Somebody ought to look after him, as he is liable to get up, and that would greatly hasten his death."

"I will look after him," replied Joe.

"Then you'd better stay with him now and I will send my clerk over with the stuff. He will give you the necessary directions."

The doctor went away and Joe took a chair in the room and listened to the delirious mutterings of the old man.

By and by the drug-clerk came with the medicine and instructed Joe what to do with it.

Thompson was given his first dose.

"That will make him easier after a time," said the clerk. "Dr. Morton, however, says that he cannot possibly live over thirty-six hours at the outside, and he will not be surprised if he's dead in the morning. The only nourishment you need give him is a little of this concentrated beef—say a small teaspoonful in a cup of hot water. I'll stay with the patient while you go downstairs and have the cook prepare it for you."

Joe returned with the preparation in about ten minutes, and then the clerk went away.

Soon after the supper bell rang the landlord sent his man to the room to let Joe off to get his supper.

Half an hour later the boy was back at his post, with no intention of quitting it that night.

Thompson remained quiet, breathing heavily and apparently unconscious—a kind of stupid doze—for several hours.

The room was illuminated with a lamp, which Joe turned low.

With the coming of dark Silver Creek seemed to wake up into a new kind of existence—that kind of life which centered around the numerous saloons.

There was music and dancing to be found in divers places.

There were various gambling devices in operation in back rooms, the way to which was as easy to find as rolling off a log.

It was after dark that the saloons did a land-office business.

Joe could hear the boisterous talk, and sometimes the clink of glasses, in the big front room downstairs.

People occasionally came upstairs, as the evening wore on, and went to bed.

The greater part of Silver Creek's population, however, did not retire to their bunks until some time after midnight, especially of a Saturday, when the mining laborers, with their week's wages in their pockets, and a whole day

before them to sleep off a booze, kept the ball rolling until nearly daylight.

This was Thursday night that Joe kept his lonesome vigil in the sick man's room and consequently things were quieter, though the boy thought there was plenty of life stirring in town.

It was along toward one o'clock that Zeke Thompson opened his eyes and gave evidence that he was in a rational state of mind.

"Rushmore, are you there?" he said, in a weak voice.

"Yes, sir. I see you've got your senses back. I'll give you a couple of spoonfuls of this beef juice."

The old man took it without a word, then he said: "Where am I?"

"In a room in the Hathaway Hotel. Don't you remember that I brought you into the saloon below?"

"Yes, I remember that you did. You helped me into town, though I don't recollect much of the journey. You've treated me white, boy, and you're doing more for me now than I could expect of you, who are a stranger to me. But your reward is to come. It is strange that you, the son of Henry Rushmore, my old friend, should be the one to be on hand to succor me in my last hours. For I am going to die, my lad. I know it. I can feel it. I sha'n't live till morning, but before I go I mean to put you in possession of the key to a fortune—a fortune of millions."

Joe looked at him sharply.

Surely the old fellow must be wandering again in his mind.

His eye, however, was preternaturally bright, and he seemed to be sensible.

"Where is my coat?" he asked, after a moment or two.

"It is hanging on the wall."

"Get it down."

Joe, wondering what he could want with his coat, took it down from the hook on which it was suspended.

"Feel along in the back lining. There is a paper there. Rip the lining open so you can take it out. I want it."

The boy obeyed his wishes and presently placed the paper in his hand.

He opened it with some difficulty, and then Joe saw that it was a diagram with figures and words rudely scrawled upon it.

"This," said the old prospector, "marks the location of a very rich deposit of silver ore. There are millions of dollars' worth of the metal almost in sight. It is a valley in the mountain range twenty miles from here, and in a region as yet unsuspected as a depository of silver ore. I have staked out the claim, and complied with all the requirements of the law. All that remains to secure it is to register it properly with the authorities. That will remain for you to do."

Joe listened in great wonder to Thompson's words.

The dying man then minutely explained to the boy how he would be able to find the silver mine.

After that he told Joe to get pen, ink and paper.

"I want to dictate my will. I intend to leave you all my right and title as discoverer to this valuable property. Its possession will make you a rich boy, and in this way I shall repay you for your disinterested kindness to a poor old man who was once your father's friend."

Joe got the writing materials from the saloon and wrote as Thompson dictated.

It was a short will, but it said all that was necessary to say.

"Now you must get two witnesses to witness my signature and attest its genuineness with their signatures," said the prospector.

Joe went down again to ask Mr. Hathaway to come up and bring another man with him for the required purpose.

He found the landlord talking with the superintendent of the Crescent Leasing Co., and induced them both to come up and witness the old man's will.

They did so.

The short will was read to them, leaving everything of which Thompson died possessed, together with all his rights to any mineral discoveries he had made, to Joe Rushmore.

It was easy to see that they regarded the material benefits conveyed by the will as something of a joke, but nevertheless, to satisfy the prospector, they witnessed his signature, and signed their names in due form, after which they withdrew.

"Deposit this will at the proper place, Rushmore, as soon as possible after I am dead, and then have the necessary documents concerning the mine made out by some competent person and have them registered. You will find all the necessary information in my pocketbook."

Joe promised to do it, though he had no great faith in the existence of the silver mine that the paper said was to be his.

He determined, however, to hunt up the locality described, in the pocket in the mountains, and see for himself if the mine was actually there.

If it was, then a new life would open before him.

If, on the contrary, the mine existed only in the dying prospector's disordered fancy, as he half believed, then he would be no better nor worse off than he was now.

He had everything to gain and nothing to lose by taking the proposed trip.

CHAPTER III.

MAKING PREPARATIONS.

Soon after Zeke Thompson made his will he grew delirious again, and Joe poured a dose of the medicine down his throat.

In time he became quieter, but his breathing grew more labored, and he had great difficulty in catching his breath.

About three o'clock in the morning, when the house was all quiet, and the town as well, the old prospector started up in bed, gasped for air, glared wildly at Joe, and then fell back on his pillow.

The boy rushed to help him, but help was no longer possible.

The death rattle was in the man's throat, and in a few minutes he was dead.

As soon as Joe was certain of this fact he closed the staring eyes and bound up the sagging jaw with a towel.

After that he covered the face of the corpse with the end of the sheet.

That was all he could do.

He had no nervous qualms about remaining alone in the

room with the dead man, so he tilted the chair back against the wall, and, folding his arms, began to think about his strange meeting with his father's old friend, and what that meeting might lead to if there was any truth in the existence of the silver mine.

During the last hours of the old man's life Joe had experienced great difficulty in keeping awake, for he was tired and in great need of rest.

Now that there was nothing to require his attention, he soon dozed off into a deep sleep, and did not awake till he felt a hand on his shoulder, and opening his eyes saw that it was broad daylight and that Mr. Hathaway's man was shaking him into wakefulness.

"So the old fellow is dead, eh?" said the man, as soon as the boy was aroused. "Died some time during the night, did he?"

"Yes," answered Joe.

"Well, lock the door on him and come down to breakfast. I s'pose the town will have to bury him."

Joe didn't like the idea of having the dead prospector buried like a pauper, so after the morning meal he hunted up the undertaker and tried to make a deal with him.

"I should like to have Mr. Thompson buried like a Christian," he said. "If you'll do the right thing by him I'll guarantee to pay you the bill by instalments as soon as I get to work with the Crescent Leasing Co. Mr. Wilbur has promised to put me on in a day or two."

"That's all right, my young friend; but, you see, I don't know you," replied the undertaker. "If you'll get Mr. Wilbur, or somebody else in town, to guarantee you, I'll take the matter under consideration."

Joe went back to the hotel and told Mr. Hathaway what the undertaker said.

"Are you willing to see me through on this thing? I'll agree that when I get to work on the Crescent Lease my wages shall be paid over to you. I'll board with you and you can give me a bed in any old place till the undertaker is paid. After that I'll work on till I get a stake."

"What's the matter with the town buryin' the old fellow?" replied Mr. Hathaway. "Why are ye so bent on standin' for it?"

"Because Mr. Thompson was an old friend of my father's."

"He was!" answered the landlord, in some surprise. "Did he say he was?"

"He did."

"And ye believe that?"

"I do because he gave me some evidence of the fact."

"Do ye expect to make anythin' out of that will he gave yer?"

"I couldn't tell you."

"It's my opinion it isn't worth the paper it's writ on. Ye kin sell the burro for a few dollars, and if there's anythin' else worth disposin' of it's yours, but that's all yer likely to realize, I'm thinkin'."

"Well, how about the undertaker?"

"Since yer bent on payin' for his plantin' I'll see ye through, for I kind of admire yer grit, and I believe ye'll stand by yer word."

"I will."

"Enough said. I'll sell the burro for what he'll bring, and I'll put half of that money I charged him for board

and lodgin' to it. That'll help yer out some. The balance ye'll have to make good."

The matter being settled to Joe's satisfaction, the undertaker was notified to take charge of the body and give Zeke Thompson a decent burial.

Mr. Wilbur personally loaned Joe \$10 to buy a grave in the Silver Creek burial ground, and the old prospector was suitably interred.

The next day the boy went to work for the Crescent Leasing Co.

When Joe proposed to have the old man's will probated the superintendent of the leasing company laughed and told him that it would be a useless expense, and advised him not to bother with it.

"But," said the boy, "Mr. Thompson told me that he had made a valuable discovery of silver ore in the mountains about twenty miles from here, that he had taken up the claim according to law, and that all that remained was to register it."

"He told you that?" said the surprised mining man.

"Yes, sir. He said it was worth millions."

"Did he give you the directions by which you could verify this information?"

"He did. I mean to hunt the place up as soon as I pay off the debts and get a few dollars together."

"What he said may be true, but I have my doubts. The region within a hundred miles of Silver Creek has been pretty well gone over by prospectors time and again within the last ten years, and wherever gold or silver has been discovered by surface indications, it has been, or is being, exploited. I'm afraid Thompson was off his base. Did you find any specimens of ore in his saddlebags?"

"There were no saddlebags on the burro."

"There wasn't? What did the old man have besides his burro?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing at all?"

"Not a thing."

Mr. Wilbur whistled.

"He must have lost his outfit somewhere along the road, which would go to show that his mind was unbalanced. His story of his silver discovery I guess is all bosh. If I were you I wouldn't waste my time thinking about it."

While this conversation with the superintendent was not encouraging to Joe, he did not altogether give up the hope that there might be something tangible about the silver discovery.

He was sustained by the diagram the old man had given him of the location of the alleged mine, and he frequently looked at it and pondered over it.

"Surely no man would draw such a thing just for fun, especially an old prospector like Mr. Thompson," thought the boy. "Well, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. Some day, soon, I'm going to hunt that place up and see with my own eyes what truth there is in his story."

In order to be able to identify real silver ore when he saw it, as well as the general indications of its presence in the ground, Joe began to study up the subject at the mine where he was working.

He asked questions of the other men, and of Mr. Wilbur, and they readily gave him all the information he craved for.

He worked steadily and faithfully day after day, and let nothing pass him by that would give him the least bit of light on the subject of mines and mining.

He went to the company's smelter, saw the process that the rough ore went through and asked more questions that added greatly to his enlightenment on the subject of precious metals.

By the time he had squared his debt with Mr. Hathaway and repaid Mr. Wilbur his \$10 loan, he was fully competent to go on a prospecting expedition himself, with a reasonable chance of not wasting his time on barren fields.

He continued to work at the Crescent Lease in order to accumulate a fund to make the necessary purchases for the trip he had resolved to make at the earliest moment.

He laid in the articles by degrees.

Among his purchases was a revolver, which seemed to be a necessary adjunct in that rough region.

Had the Hurley gang still been reported in that district he might have hesitated about undertaking his contemplated journey alone, for one experience with members of that crowd was quite sufficient for him, and he had no relish for coming up against them again.

The sheriff of the county, however, had succeeded in cornering the desperadoes soon after Joe's arrival in Silver Creek, and after a pitched battle between the two parties, in which there had been serious casualties on both sides, the Hurleyites had fled, and for several weeks nothing had been heard of them.

Joe was now saving up funds to buy a burro and provide himself with provisions for his short journey to the mountain range and during his stay there.

He might be away a week, or he might be away three weeks, he couldn't tell how long till he got upon the ground.

His object was to make a thorough search of the neighborhood pointed out to him by the diagram and the last words of the dying prospector.

There were many reasons why an older and more experienced man would have regarded the trip as something of a wild goose chase, but Joe Rushmore was full of the enthusiasm of youth, and he was willing and even eager to take chances where another person would have hesitated.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BOY AND THE SAD-EYED BURRO.

One evening as the shades of twilight were falling upon the landscape, and Joe was returning from the mine to the hotel in town for his supper, he overtook a boy of nearly his own age mounted on a sad-eyed burro, jogging slowly toward Silver Creek.

Joe's burro, which belonged to Mr. Hathaway, was such a bright-looking, healthy beast that it made the other look like thirty cents.

"Hello, pard," said Joe, for introductions were not necessary out there in order to strike up an acquaintance with a stranger, "bound for town?"

"I ain't bound for nowhere else," grinned the boy.

"Where do you hail from?"

"Most anywhere, but just now from Paradise Crik."

"Paradise Creek!" repeated Joe. "You've come some distance."

"A pretty good piece."

"Your burro looks as though he was tired of life."

"Yep, but he's only sulky. He's thinkin'."

"Thinking!" ejaculated Joe.

"Yep. Thinkin' whether I'm goin' to stay in town over night or only long enough to feed up."

"Oh, that's why he looks so down in the mouth?" laughed Joe.

"Yep."

"What's your name, pard?"

"Sam Short. What's yours?"

"Joe Rushmore."

"Shake," said the boy, holding out his hand.

Joe shook his rough, brown hand in a friendly way.

"Are you bound for any place in particular?" he asked the boy.

"Nope."

"Then you haven't any plans?"

"Nope."

"What do you do for a living? Work around the mines?"

"Yep, when I feel like it or have to."

"Then you only work occasionally?"

"Yep."

"What do you do most of the time?"

"Travel."

"On that burro?"

"Yep."

"I suppose that accounts for the animal thinking so hard."

"Yep."

"You're a strange boy. You rather interest me."

"You interest me, too."

"How is that?"

"I rather like you."

"I don't know but I like you, too, though I can't say why."

"Wish you'd pull up stakes and travel with me. I'm gettin' lonesome."

"No," replied Joe, "I'm not cut out for a rolling stone. I prefer to work, and with a purpose in view."

"Makin' money, I s'pose."

"That's the main object in view out here."

"Yep, but I don't care for money."

"You don't?" exclaimed Joe, in surprise.

"Nope. Not so long as I have all I want to eat. The burro's lucky. He kin live on grass, but I can't. Wish I could."

"What do you do in winter, when traveling is bad and the burro can't find grass handy?"

"Go south."

"How far south have you been?"

"To the Rio Grande."

"Say, you're a peacherino."

"Nope. I'm from Missouri."

Joe laughed at the half earnest, half comical expression on the boy's face.

"How long have you been traveling around this way?" he asked.

"Two years. Ever since pap passed in his checks."

"Then you're an orphan, I suppose?"

"Yep."

"So am I."

"Are you?" said the boy, looking interested. "Shake."

Joe took his hand again as they entered the long street of Silver Creek.

"Well, Sam," he said, "you'll stop with me to-night, I guess."

"Yep. Where's your shack?"

"I put up at Hathaway's Hotel."

"You must be flush."

"Not very. I've got the cheapest accommodation in the house."

"Get enough to eat, don't you? Your burro looks fat. Bet mine kin hold out longer on a stretch."

"Hathaway sets a good table. You'll have the chance to sample his feed."

"How about my burro?"

"I'll see that he gets all he can eat, too."

As Joe uttered these words the sad-eyed animal picked up his ears, raised his head and seemed to take notice for the first time.

"He heard you," said Sam Short.

"What are you talking about?"

"The burro."

"What about him?"

"He heard you say that you'd see he got all he could eat. Didn't you see him raise up his head?"

"I suppose you expect me to believe that your burro understood what I said to you?"

"He understood it. He understands everythin'. You can't fool him nohow. I've tried it, but it was no go. See that ear go up now?"

"I see it. He hears that team coming down the street. Well, here we are at the hotel. Turn into the yard and we'll put our animals up for the night."

Joe led the burros into the stable, and after they were stripped, each was put in a stall and provided with water and feed.

The sad-eyed animal went for his portion as if he was famished, and Joe gave him an extra quantity, for which, no doubt, he was grateful, after an animal fashion.

"Come up to my room and take a wash," said Joe to his new acquaintance.

Sam followed him up the back stairs on the outside of the building.

"This shakedown of mine isn't big enough for two, but I'll let you have a blanket, and you can curl up on the floor," said Joe, when they entered his box-like room. "You won't mind, I guess, for it won't cost you anything."

"Nope. Anythin' is good enough for me," replied Sam, good-naturedly.

After sprucing up a bit they went down to supper.

Joe was a prime favorite with the girls, and as there were only a couple of persons at the table, the two waitresses made a break for the boys, beaming graciously on Rushmore.

Maggie considered Joe as more or less her property, as she was the first to make his acquaintance, and she was the first to wish him good-evening.

"Hello, Maggie," said the boy. "This is my friend, Sam Short."

Sam grinned and the girl bobbed her head.

Joe also introduced Sam to Mamie, the other girl.

"You can take Sam's order, Mamie," said Rushmore.

"Maggie will look after me."

"Maggie always looks after you. Nobody else gets half a chance," replied the girl, with a touch of jealousy in her tone.

"Well, Maggie has the call," laughed Joe. "She had the honor of my acquaintance first, you know."

"Of course I did," said Maggie. "I gave you your first meal in the house."

"Don't let us have any scrap over it. Get a move on, both of you; we're hungry. Sam hasn't seen a square meal since he left Missouri two years ago."

"What a fib!" ejaculated Mamie, as she placed a glass of water for Sam and then started off to bring the soup.

"What will you have, Joe?" said Maggie, when she placed the soup before Rushmore. "Boiled beef or roast pork?"

"Oh, pork is good enough for me," replied Joe.

Sam ordered some, too.

The meal was evidently a banquet for the owner of the sad-eyed burro, and he piled into it as if making up for several missing dinners.

When both had eaten as much as they wanted they walked into the saloon, where Joe told Mr. Hathaway to charge up Sam's meal against him.

He said that Sam would share his room with him that night, if it was all the same to the landlord.

"The room is yours, Rushmore. I sha'n't charge yer nothin' for runnin' in a friend. Who is he?"

"He's a traveler from Missouri."

Mr. Hathaway regarded Sam with some curiosity, but made no remark.

The boys then walked outside, and finding two vacant chairs, sat down.

"Say, Sam," said Joe, "I'm going to the mountains in a few days. How would you like to remain in town and go along with me?"

"I'll do it," replied Sam, with some animation.

"I'd rather have a chap like you along than go it alone."

"What are you goin' to do in the mount'ins?"

"Hunt for silver. If I find any you shall have a share."

"Ho!" ejaculated Sam, without any enthusiasm.

"I'll pay your board, and that of your burro, while you stay in town, and put up the grub for a three-weeks' trip. Does that hit you?"

"Yep."

"In return I shall probably want you to help me out if I strike what I'm after."

"I'll help," replied Sam.

"Then we'll consider the matter settled," said Joe.

Shortly afterward they left their seats and took a walk around town.

CHAPTER V.

A HOLD-UP.

When Joe fed the burros in the morning the sad-eyed one raised his head and gave him an intelligent look.

He lifted his big ears, too, and wagged them solemnly back and forth, then he pitched into the feed.

"That burro was talkin' to you," said Sam, who stood near by with an empty water bucket in his hand.

"Does he talk with his ears?" laughed Joe.

"Yep."

"What was he saying?"

"That you were a brick."

"I dare say he's grateful to get a full stomach. Are you going out with me to the mine?"

"Yep."

"Then put the saddle on your animal. Your bags are safe in my room."

"Nothin' much in 'em."

A few minutes later they rode out of the yard and took their way toward the hills.

There were mines all about the neighborhood, the Crescent Lease being about a mile and a half out of town.

The boys carried their lunches with them and some feed for the burros.

Joe found some work for Sam to do, and the lad from Missouri earned a dollar.

He stuffed it way in his clothes for future needs.

When Joe got his pay Saturday afternoon he resigned his job with the understanding that he was to get it again when he came back to town, if he wanted it.

Instead of buying a burro for his trip to the mountains he arranged with Mr. Hathaway for the use of his animal.

The saddlebags of both boys were well filled with provisions, a prospecting outfit and other things Joe believed that he needed.

As Sam insisted on carrying the larger part of the things, Joe strapped a pick and shovel on his back, and the cooking utensils on the back of his burro.

The animal had worn a rather happy expression for the last few days, but when they took the trail for the mountains the sad look came back, and one of his ears hung down, while the other stood straight up.

"What is he carrying his ears that way for?" asked Joe.

"He's figurin'."

"What is he figuring about?" chuckled Joe.

"About the prospect ahead. If I went off alone his ears would be down. As you're with me he's wonderin' what's in the wind."

"Oh, that's it?"

"Yep. The ear that's standin' up is on your side. He's listenin' to see if he kin get a pointer from you."

"That's pretty good. You could make money exhibiting your burro in a dime museum in the cities."

"Ho!" ejaculated Sam, and became silent.

It was Sunday morning and a fine, sunshiny day.

The boys traveled without a stop until about noon, when, feeling hungry, a halt was made to eat and to let the animals have a rest.

They had covered some twelve miles at an easy gait.

The mountain range was straight ahead, and they were already on the up-grade.

They ate a lunch of sandwiches and cold coffee, provided by Maggie, and consequently they were not obliged to cook anything.

About two o'clock they started on again and by five were well up in the range.

They were passing along a narrow section of the trail, bordered on one side by great boulders, and on the other by a deep ravine, when Joe's attention was attracted by the appearance of some of the rocks.

He thought he detected indications of silver-bearing quartz.

"Hold on, Sam," he said, dismounting and taking a closer look at the rock.

"What are you lookin' at, Joe?" asked the Missouri boy.

"Looks as if there might be metal in this neighborhood," replied Rushmore.

"Mean silver?"

"Yes. Unship your shovel and pick. I'm going to get out some specimens, at any rate."

He took a small bag off his own burro and threw it on the ground.

"Now, Sam, you can go ahead with the animals and look for a place to pitch camp. Stake out the burros and start a fire. By that time I'll catch up with you."

"If you don't show up by the time the fire is goin' I'll be back after you," said Sam, starting up the animals.

They soon disappeared around a turn in the range, and Joe was left alone to get out his specimens, which, after all, amounted to nothing, as his eye had been deceived by the character of the rock, not being educated up to know the difference between the true and the false.

He worked away for about a quarter of an hour, and had accumulated quite a small pile of specimens, when four men, one of them mounted on a burro, came in sight up the trail.

Joe didn't notice them till they were right on him, and then, to his dismay, he recognized the three men who were on foot as the rascals who had held him up that afternoon, two months back, when he was on his way to Jordan.

The man on the burro, a hard-looking six-footer, seemed to be their leader.

Apparently the Hurley gang had returned to their old stamping grounds.

"Hello, younker," said the leader, with an unpleasant grin. "What yer doin'? Prospectin'?"

"Yes," replied Joe.

"So are we. Prospectin' for cash. Got any yer kin lend a stranger?"

"Nothing much."

"Turn out yer pockets and let's see what yer hev got."

"Is this a hold-up?" asked the boy, resentfully.

"I reckon. Do yer know me?"

"No."

"Wal, I'm Bill Hurley. You've heard of me, I guess,"

"I have."

"Then yer know thet I don't stand no nonsense. Help him unload, boys."

Two of the ruffians seized Joe, while the third went through his clothes.

"You cleaned me out two months ago on the road to Jordan. You ought to be satisfied with that," protested Joe.

"We'd jest as soon clean you out a third time if we should ketch yer ag'in," replied Hurley, with a hoarse guffaw. "What has he got?" he added to the searcher.

"Six dollars in bills and some loose change."

"Hand it over, and keep on. Yer may find some more hid away."

The man went into all his pockets and finally brought forth the diagram and guide to the silver mine.

"What's thet?" asked Hurley, dismounting from the burro.

"Looks like a diagram of some minin' property here in the mount'ins," said his associate, holding it up.

Hurley looked it over without taking it from the man's hand.

He studied the marks, and words, and figures, while Joe watched his actions with no little anxiety.

At length the rascal made up his mind that the document was one of importance, and represented the site of a body of valuable ore in that neighborhood.

"Tie his arms about that tree," he said.

Joe was quickly secured to an old, dead trunk that stood close to the edge of the precipice.

"Now, then," cried Hurley, shaking his fist at the helpless boy, "tell us the location of that mine, or we'll throw you into the ravine."

Joe saw that his predicament was a desperate one, for the ruffians were thoroughly in earnest.

"I couldn't tell you to save my life, for I don't know myself," he said, with an earnestness that was not lost on Hurley. "I'm hunting for it."

"Where did you get that paper?"

"From an old prospector who died in Silver Creek two months ago."

"He must have told you something about it."

"He told me it was in a certain part of these mountains, but as I don't know anything about the range I couldn't give you any idea at all where it is."

"And yer huntin' around tryin' to locate it, eh?"

"Yes."

"Wal, we'll save yer the trouble," grinned Hurley.

He took the paper from his companion's hand, folded it up and put it in his pocket.

Then he mounted his burro and told his men to proceed.

"Hold on," cried Joe. "Aren't you going to cut me loose from this tree?"

"Do you want us to throw you down the mount'in?" asked Hurley, with an ugly look, which showed that he was quite capable of executing such a piece of villainy.

"Of course I don't."

"Then shet up and saw wood. Thank yer stars we're lettin' yer off as easy as we're doin'. If you was a man we wouldn't think twice about tossin' yer into the ravine."

Thus speaking, Hurley jogged off after his men, who had already disappeared among the boulders ahead.

CHAPTER VI.

HUNTING FOR THE VALLEY.

"My gracious!" muttered Joe, as soon as he was alone. "This is a bad pickle to be in. And the worst of it is that they've gone in the same direction as that taken by Sam. When they come up with him they'll take the two burros and all our provisions; and no doubt tie Sam up to a tree like myself. That will leave us both in a fine predicament. I never expected to run against anything like this. I thought the Hurley crowd was broken up for good and driven away, but it seems they have sneaked back again. Dear me, this is fierce!"

Joe tried his best to get his wrists free, but it was no go.

He was anchored to the dead tree securely enough to defy his best efforts to get away without help.

The chances that Sam would be able to assist him out of the scrape seemed exceedingly small at that moment.

The loss of the diagram of the mine location would be

a serious handicap to the boy in his treasure hunt; but the loss of the burros and the provisions on top of it, meant the end of the trip right there, even if they were both so fortunate as to escape themselves.

While Joe was feeling greatly discouraged over the outlook, Sam, to his intense relief and satisfaction, suddenly showed up.

"Joe," he said, stopping a short distance away, "are you comin'?"

"I would, if I could. Can't you see that I'm bound to this tree?"

"You're what?" ejaculated Sam.

"I'm tied to this tree."

Sam advanced with bulging eyes.

"So you are," he said. "Why, how did that happen? Who bound you?"

"Four of the biggest rascals unhanged. They came on me unawares, cleaned out my pockets and tied my arms around this tree. Didn't you see them at all? They went off along the trail in the same direction you took with the animals. I thought sure they'd nab you, too, and get away with everything that belonged to us."

"I didn't see them," replied Sam. "I guess they must have turned off where the trail branches off down the ravine."

"Well, it's mighty fortunate they did," said Joe, as Sam produced a big jackknife and cut him loose. "We'd be in a nice pickle if they'd cleaned us out of our outfit and tied you up like myself into the bargain. We would have stood a good show of starving to death before anyone came this way. Where did you pitch camp?"

"About half a mile from here. There is lots of grass for the burros, and water runnin' down the rocks. I've got a fire started. It will be out if we ain't on hand to put more wood on it."

"Come on, then," said Joe, tumbling his specimens into the bag. "You carry that pickaxe, Sam, and I'll look after the shovel."

Sam led the way to a small nook in the range, where the grass grew soft and green, and a tiny cascade tumbled down the rocks from some point hundreds of feet above.

The burros, tethered to a tree, seemed to be enjoying themselves, while to one side was the glowing embers of a fire that had almost burned itself out.

"Put more fuel on that fire, Sam, and then we'll get supper. That stream of water is particularly handy. I was afraid we might have trouble finding water just when we wanted it."

Joe put the water on to boil for the coffee, while Sam, who was something of a rough cook, got the frying pan on the fire and soon had a mess of bacon and eggs done to a turn, which he served up on the tin plates they had brought along.

"Sam," said Joe, while they were eating, "I'm afraid this expedition is going to be a failure."

"How so?" asked his companion.

"Those rascals who robbed me and tied me to that tree got away with the paper on which I mostly relied to find a silver mine that is somewhere in this vicinity."

"That a fact?" asked Sam, astonished.

"Yes, that's a fact. It was to find that mine that I started out on this trip, not to do prospecting."

He then told Sam of the circumstances under which he had gotten possession of the diagram.

"Of course, now that we're here, I don't mean to give up the search without an effort, for the old prospector gave me additional directions how to find the little valley in which the mine is hidden away; but, nevertheless, without the diagram, I am afraid that the chances are against me."

"Those chaps that robbed you may find it, then what are you goin' to do?"

"It wouldn't do them any good. They couldn't work the mine to any advantage to themselves, for they're marked men, every one of them. The sheriff of the county will be after them with a posse as soon as he learns they have come to the district. I have been figuring on whether I hadn't better send you back to town to notify him without loss of time."

Sam didn't receive that proposition with any enthusiasm. He wasn't anxious to return to Silver Creek.

Before the meal was ended Joe decided that they would spend the next day looking for the valley where the mine was supposed to be.

The lost diagram had no bearing on this part of the quest.

He had all the main landmarks in his head—the chief question was, would he be able to recognize enough of them to answer the purpose?

After reaching the valley they could make a thorough search of it for traces of the mine.

Thompson had found it without the aid of any diagram, why might not he and Sam be able to rediscover it in the same way?

The diagram would not do Hurley and his crowd any good that he could see, for they did not possess any general idea where the mine was located.

If they found the valley, and knew the mine was somewhere in it, then the diagram would come into play as a valuable pointer.

In any case, as he had said to Sam, he did not see what good it would do them to find it, for it would be only a question of a short time before an armed force would rout them out of the neighborhood.

The boys talked a while after supper, chiefly on the prospects of finding the mine, in which Sam now began to show considerable interest, and then they rolled themselves up in their blankets, laid down on the velvety grass, and were soon asleep.

They were up with the sun, and after cooking and eating their frugal breakfast started off to hunt for the valley they were after, which Joe knew was somewhere in the neighborhood.

The trail they were following soon took a course sloping downward.

The scenery was wild and rather barren, and not, to Joe's eyes, particularly picturesque.

They soon came to a place where another trail crossed the one they were pursuing, and as this coincided with Thompson's directions, Joe turned off into the new trail.

"We ought to run across a cabin pretty soon," said Joe. "That will be my next landmark."

The trail led around the base of a precipitous section of the range, and then was lost in a gulley.

Beyond the gulley they came out into the trail again, and soon after they came in sight of the cabin.

"We're on the right track, all right," said Joe, pointing out the lone habitation. "I think there's no doubt but we'll find the valley before long."

Thompson had told Joe that the cabin was deserted, but now as they approached it they saw smoke issuing from the chimney.

"Hold on, Sam, we've got to be cautious. Those four ruffians may be in there. If they saw us coming I'm afraid there'd be something doing."

They reined in their burros and Joe directed his companion to lead the animals to one side out of sight of the cabin.

"I'm going ahead to investigate," he said, taking his revolver out of one of the saddlebags. "You wait here and keep a sharp lookout."

It was rather an embarrassing predicament they were in, for they had to pass the house in order to continue their journey.

Joe feared that the four desperadoes were in possession of the dwelling, and his object was to make sure of that fact before he considered what they should do next.

He made his way forward, keeping well in the shadow of the surrounding rocks, and watching the cabin at frequent intervals.

Finally he saw the door open and a young girl come out with a tin bucket in her hand.

Joe stopped in great surprise and watched her walk down to a little stream of water that flowed among the rocks and ran across the trail.

While he was looking at her filling the bucket, a stalwart, white-haired man appeared at the door and looked after her.

"That smoke was a false alarm, after all," breathed Joe. "Those ruffians are not here, thank goodness. But this man and the girl, I wonder who they are? According to Thompson, there was no one living at the shack when he passed this way. These are newcomers who have probably taken temporary possession of the hut. They must be traveling through the range. They can hardly be doing that on foot, so I suppose they have horses, or a team, somewhere about."

Joe concluded to walk forward and introduce himself.

As he drew nearer the habitation he saw a sort of prairie schooner drawn up behind the house and a pair of horses tied to the back of the wagon.

The girl carried the pail of water to the animals and gave them a drink.

At this moment the white-haired man noted the approach of Joe.

CHAPTER VII.

MR. MAITLAND AND JESS.

"Well, young man, who might you be?" asked the occupant of the hut, in a friendly way.

"My name is Joe Rushmore," replied the boy, cheerily.

"And my name is Maitland," replied the white-haired man, who was a hale, hearty and rugged specimen of manhood in spite of the color of his hair. "This is my daughter, Jess," he added, as the girl came forward with the bucket swinging in her hand.

Joe turned and bowed politely to the girl, who responded in a shy way.

Her face and form were simply perfect in their outlines, and the simple attire she wore seemed to set her loveliness off to better advantage than had she been decked out in silks and jewels.

"Will you come in and have breakfast with us?" asked Maitland, in a hospitable way.

"Myself and my companion breakfasted about an hour ago," replied Joe, "but I don't think we would object to taking a cup of coffee with you."

"Where is your companion?" asked the man, glancing up the trail.

"Out of sight behind those rocks, with our burros. He is a boy of my own age. I'll return and bring him and our outfit up."

"Do so. Jess, make some more coffee and fry a few more eggs."

Joe, after another admiring glance at the girl, turned around and went back to the spot where he had left Sam and the animals.

"Come on, Sam. It's all right. There's an elderly man and his daughter stopping at that cabin. We're invited to breakfast. Do you think you can eat any more?"

"Try me," grinned Sam, as he dug the sad-eyed burro in the side with his heels.

The white-haired man was waiting for them outside the door, and when they came up Joe introduced his companion.

"Tie your burros to the side or front of the wagon and come in the house," said Mr. Maitland.

By that time the girl had the extra coffee and eggs in readiness, and all four sat up to the table.

"So you are from Silver Creek," said the white-haired man. "We are bound there. How far away is it?"

"About twenty-five miles to the northeast."

"That's about what I made it. And where might you lads be going?"

"We are looking for a small valley in the range which is somewhere in this vicinity."

"A small valley! There is one not over two miles from here. This trail leads to it."

"I'll bet that's the one we're after," said Joe, in a tone of satisfaction.

"You are very liable to miss it unless you look carefully," said Maitland. "It seems to be enclosed on all sides by spurs of the range. It was quite by accident that I discovered it yesterday afternoon. I was looking around for water, and my search took me through a short, narrow and circuitous gorge. It suddenly opened out on the valley in question."

"That's the valley!" exclaimed Joe. "Your description tallies with mine."

"You will find that the entrance to it is but a mere slit, only wide enough for you to ride your animals through in single file."

"That's right. That's the way the old man who told me about it described it."

"What do you expect to find in the valley?" asked the white-haired man, curiously.

"Well, sir, I'm looking for silver; but whether I'll find any is a question."

"Then you're out prospecting, are you?"

"I'm following up the lead of an old prospector who died two months ago in Silver Creek. He told me that he had located a good thing somewhere in that valley. He gave me full directions, with a diagram, how to find the spot. The diagram, however, was taken from me with the rest of my effects last night by four desperadoes. Let me advise you to be on the lookout for the rascals, for if they should come upon you they will take everything you have, and you will be lucky to escape with your lives."

This startling bit of information caused Jess Maitland to look at her father in some dismay.

Mr. Maitland looked serious.

"I confess that I did not expect to encounter such gentry on our trip through the range. Nevertheless, we are well armed, and are never off our guard. Jess can use a rifle even better than I. I may say that she is a crack shot."

Joe then went on to explain who the scoundrels were, and how for their atrocities they had been driven out of the district by the sheriff and a posse.

"The four that did me up yesterday are probably all that are left of the gang, but as Hurley himself is one of them they are likely to give the authorities a good deal of trouble yet. I hope you will report their presence in these mountains to the sheriff as soon as you reach Silver Creek, so that he can organize an expedition against them before they can get in any of their crooked work."

"I will do so, of course," replied Maitland. "But aren't you afraid of meeting these men yourselves before you leave the range?"

"We intend to keep a good lookout for them."

"You ought to have rifles with you to protect yourselves."

"We have revolvers. We thought those weapons a sufficient protection in a general way, for we had no idea of meeting such rascals in these parts. Everybody in Silver Creek believes that the Hurleyites have left the district for good after the run-in they had with the sheriff and his party two months ago."

"Well, I have an extra rifle in the wagon which you are welcome to the loan of if you wish to take it. I expect to take up residence in Silver Creek and go into the mining business, in which I'm an expert, if things pan out right. You will easily find us in town when you return, which I suppose will be soon, as you do not seem to be provided with an outfit for a lengthy stay."

"Our stay will all depend on our discoveries while in the valley. We may get back in a week, or not for two or three weeks. As to the rifle, I will accept it with thanks. I think it will come in very handy in case of an emergency. I will hunt you up and return it to you on our return."

The boys remained an hour after the meal was ended, and during that time Joe managed to get on very friendly terms with Jess Maitland, who seemed to be somewhat taken with the stalwart, good-looking boy.

He helped her to wash the dishes, while Sam was outside with her father.

He learned from her that she and her father had come from a mining district further south in the State, where he had been superintendent of a big mine.

The property having changed hands, coming into the control of a syndicate, Mr. Maitland had been superseded by another man, and that fact induced him to pull up

stakes and start for Silver Creek, where he had an offer to take charge of a new mine.

Joe then told the girl something about himself.

Why he had left Buffalo, where he was born, to begin life anew in Denver, only to meet with disappointment.

How he had started for the mining camp of Jordan, and how, after his first hold-up by the Hurley gang, he had lost his way and drifted into Silver Creek.

As he proceeded he grew quite confidential and, under her promise of keeping the matter to herself, he told her about his meeting with Zeke Thompson, and how the old prospector on his deathbed had told him about the silver mine in the valley they were going to.

"As soon as I have settled the matter of the mine one way or the other I shall return to town with Sam," he said. "If I fail to find any traces of the mine, why I'll return to work on the Crescent Lease, or go to work for your father, if he will have me on his mine. On the other hand, if I find the mine I will try and get your father, since he's an expert, to come out and look at it. I think I can depend on his honesty and squareness, and on his advice as to the best way to make it pan out to my advantage."

"Oh, yes," replied the girl, "father would not take the least advantage of you if you find that mine and should ask him to give you the benefit of his experience."

Joe believed her, for Mr. Maitland had the face of a thoroughly upright man.

"Well, boys, I wish you luck in your search for silver ore," said Mr. Maitland, as Joe and Sam were ready to move on toward the valley, the bearings of which the mining man had made so clear that Joe did not think they could miss it. "I presume you know how to take up a legal claim in case you strike anything that looks promising."

"Yes, sir; but the claim I am trying to locate is, I understand, already marked out according to law, and nothing remains to be done but to register it. I couldn't afford to take the chances of doing that until I saw with my own eyes just where the property is, because it is possible that the old prospector might have dreamed the whole thing in one of his periods of delirium."

Mr. Maitland nodded, and then Joe and Sam bade him and his daughter good-by and started off down the trail, the former carrying the borrowed rifle slung over his back.

CHAPTER VIII.

JOE FINDS THE SILVER MINE.

Twenty minutes later Joe's sharp eyes made out the narrow entrance to the defile, and he headed his burro for it.

It was easy to see how they might have missed it ninety-nine times out of a hundred if they were not actually looking for it.

"I'll bet there aren't many people who know anything about the valley hidden beyond those rocks. I'd like to bet a dollar to a cent that Hurley and his bunch will never find it, and little good it will do them if they should," said Joe.

Narrow and circuitous indeed they found it as they followed its windings until the valley itself burst unexpectedly on their view.

It was like a green oasis in the midst of a great, rocky bowl, and its circumference was probably something over a mile.

Or, viewed from the slight elevation on which the boys had reined in their animals, it was not unlike a deep, peagreen lake, that indented the base of the mountains in a score of places, the rocky spurs jutting into it like small promontories.

The sad-eyed burro lifted his head and looked upon that green surface with evident interest.

He seemed to see and smell fat meals of juicy grass awaiting his teeth, and he raised his ears one at a time and began to wave them slowly back and forth as if to express the joy he felt at the prospect ahead.

Joe's burro made no such demonstration.

The world had for a long time gone very well with him, and he was sleek and contented as ever any four-footed animal of his species could well be.

"I hope we shall find water in this valley," said Joe, as he started his burro down the gentle declivity toward the green plain.

"There's water, for I kin smell it," said Sam.

"You must have a pretty good smeller, then."

"If I can't smell it, the burro kin. See his ears point? That's a sign that he's thirsty and scents water near."

The burro himself verified Sam's statement, by starting off at a smart trot up the side of the valley without taking the trouble to consult his owner, who made no effort to restrain him.

Joe's animal trailed on behind, and sure enough, the sad-eyed beast led the way to a small stream of water flowing out of the rocks and running clean across the valley.

"I'm thinking that it's not going to be easy to locate that mine. We'll have to make a tour of all these pockets. We may strike the mine soon, or not for some time. Or, if it should happen to be out in the valley itself, we may never hit upon it at all, if it really does exist. This is where the loss of that diagram is felt. With that in my possession I've no doubt we'd be able to hit on the spot in short order," said Rushmore.

"We kin take our time huntin' for it," replied Sam. "We've got two or three weeks to do it in, hain't we?"

"You don't suppose I'm going to spend two or three weeks doing what maybe can be done in a day or two?" answered Joe.

"Didn't you say you was goin' to stay out two or three weeks? And didn't you bring enough grub along to last us that time?" asked Sam, who believed in taking things as easy as possible.

"That's all right. I'm prepared to stay three weeks hunting for that mine, if it takes that long to look the valley all over, but I'm going about it in a business-like way so as to get it over as soon as possible."

"There ain't no fun gettin' things over too soon," grumbled Sam. "If I came here alone to hunt that mine, and had enough grub, I'd take a year lookin' for it."

"Sam, you're about as lazy as they come. What do you expect to do when you get to be a man? How do you expect to earn a living?"

"I hain't thought nothin' about that. Time enough to think about that when I git to be a man," said Sam.

"I'm afraid you'll have got to be so tired by that time that you'll prefer to loaf on the sunny side of the poorhouse to getting out and hustling for the dollars."

"Ho!" ejaculated Sam.

Joe had learned that when Sam said "Ho!" there was no use of continuing the subject.

The animals had drunk their fill and were nibbling the grass.

Joe saw by the way Sam's burro wigwagged his ears that he was thoroughly contented.

With plenty of water, plenty of grass and nothing to do, the valley was a perfect paradise to a burro.

"We'll start from this point and work around the pockets," said Joe, after making up his mind as to the most methodical way to proceed with their search.

Sam had no objection, so Joe got down to business.

They spent an hour investigating three pockets, without result.

"There's a house," said Sam, as they rode into the fourth pocket.

It was a small one-story affair, built of rough stone, with a peaked wooden roof.

They went up to it and dismounted.

It consisted of two rooms, with an attic formed by the double slope of the roof.

One of the rooms was furnished with a bed, two chairs and a rude home-made locker, the other with an open fireplace, a table and four chairs, together with a cupboard and shelves.

There was a straw mattress and a couple of blankets on the bed, while in the attic there was simply one mattress, a blanket, two empty boxes, and nothing else.

A roughly-made ladder led up through a hole in the ceiling of the kitchen, as the room where the fireplace was might be styled.

Although the house was furnished for occupancy, and there were even dishes in the cupboard, and various useful articles on the shelves, while cooking utensils hung about near the fireplace, there was no evidence that the building had been tenanted for some time.

Whoever had lived there had gone away and failed to return, apparently.

It was quite useless to speculate as to their identity, or why they had lived in that secluded valley, nor how it came about that they had vanished, leaving things in order for any one who might wander in there and feel like taking possession.

Sam declared that he could live there for a year and enjoy himself if he had enough to eat.

"I'll bet you could," laughed Joe. "Well, if I find the mine I'll let you stay here and watch it while I go back to Silver Creek and have the documents made out and recorded. How would that suit you?"

"Bully," replied Sam, "if you leave enough grub to last me till you get back."

"I'll leave you all we have left. I can't leave any more."

"You ain't goin' to do any more huntin' till we have dinner, are you?"

"Why, it's too early for dinner by two hours, at least."

"What's the diff'rence? We kin sit in the sun and rest ourselves till it's time to cook somethin'."

"You can do that, if you wish. I'm going to keep on looking for the mine."

"I'll wait till you come back," said Sam, throwing the shovel and pickaxe on the ground and seating himself in the sun with his back against the house.

Joe mounted his burro and proceeded to investigate the pocket.

He followed the rocks around as he had done with the others till he reached the inner end of the pocket, where he discovered a bunch of trees.

Dismounting and tying his animal, he pushed his way among the trees and found himself at the entrance to a gorge which widened out into a lofty amphitheater as he advanced.

"I wonder where this leads to?" he thought.

He kept on till he came to a pile of rocks, evidently put there by hands.

Looking around he saw similar piles at regular intervals.

A big one in the center had a piece of paper floating from it.

"By George!" he exclaimed, excitedly, "I'll bet I've struck the mine. Those piles of stone must be Zeke Thompson's markings of his claim."

He walked up to the center pile and read the paper.

It ran as follows:

"Silver Valley Mine and Lode, discovered by Zeke Thompson, March 2, 189—," with added particulars according to law.

A few feet away was a rudely-formed hole in the mountain.

Joe took a folding lantern from his pocket, opened it out, lighted the tiny lamp inside, and crawled into the hole.

The light flashing about in spots showed him great masses of silver-bearing rock, the main lode being exposed in places to the depth of several feet.

He followed it in for about five hundred feet to a point where it stopped and ran straight downward.

Great chunks of the lode were missing in various spots, as if some one had been working the mine at random.

The floor of the tunnel was covered with silver quartz.

With the little knowledge that Joe possessed of estimating the value of gold or silver ore, he easily made out that the mine was a very rich one.

"Thompson was right, I guess, when he said there were millions in it. When the claim to this mine has been registered I'll be a rich boy, and no one can dispute my title to it."

He retraced his steps to the open air and once more examined the notice written and posted by Thompson.

Then an idea struck him.

Why not write out a duplicate claim, advancing the date to the present time and inserting his own name as the discoverer, instead of Zeke Thompson?

It would be unnecessary then for him to go through the red tape and the delay that must intervene if he proved the old prospector's will.

He decided to do it.

He had paper in his saddlebags.

Taking the Thompson notice with him, he returned to the spot where he had left his burro.

The animal had moved in under the trees to get out of the glare of the summer sun, and was standing as if asleep.

Glancing over toward the house, Joe was startled at seeing several men there around the door.

Sam was not in sight.

A second survey of the strangers convinced Rushmore that they were Bill Hurley and his three companions.

CHAPTER IX.

JESS MAITLAND IN TROUBLE.

"Whew!" breathed Joe. "Those rascals have found their way into the valley after all, and of course they've captured poor Sam. That's tough on him. The next thing they'll be doing is to hunt for the mine. They'll be almost certain to find their way here, and then they'll discover the burro, the gorge, the mine, and me on top of it all, unless there is some way by which I can keep in hiding. It's a good thing I brought the rifle with me. I ought to be able to stand them off with it, though four men, equally well armed, are mighty large odds for a boy like me to tackle."

Joe unhitched the rope by which the burro was tied to the outer tree and led him well into the grove and secured him again.

Then he removed the saddlebags from the animal's back and hid them in a convenient hole in the rocks.

Half of their food supply was in his bags and Joe meant to try and keep it from falling into the enemy's hands.

Everything else belonging to them had clearly been captured by the Hurleyites when they pounced upon the probably sleeping Sam and made him their prisoner.

"Sam was an easy mark for those rascals. I'll bet they caught him dreaming in the sun, and they hadn't the least bit of trouble in nabbing him. Sam takes the world altogether too easy, and like others who do the same, in a different way, gets it in the neck. I'll have to try and help him out of his fix. I may be able to do it, if he hasn't given them any hint of my presence in the valley. Fancying themselves alone they'll be off their guard, to a certain extent, at least, and that will give me the opportunity to do something."

That's the way Joe figured it, and he wasn't very wrong in his calculations, for Sam, after his capture, had made no mention that he had a companion with him, and so Hurley and his associates never suspected that the boy they had robbed of the diagram was now in the valley, within a short distance of the house.

Sam was not the only prisoner the Hurleyites had, as Rushmore presently discovered.

The boy stood in the shade of the friendly trees and kept a bright lookout on the house, in order to note if the rascals made any move toward his place of shelter.

Hurley himself was not visible.

He evidently was in the house, but his three men were loitering around outside.

Joe saw that the saddlebags had been removed from Sam's burro, and that the animal, in company with Hurley's beast, was tethered out in the grass.

Fifteen minutes passed away, and then Hurley came out leading a girl by the arm.

It needed but one glance for Rushmore to recognize her as Jess Maitland, and the sight of her in the power of those rascals gave the boy a shock of surprise and sent the blood bounding through his veins.

It was clear that she and her father had been attacked by the scoundrels in an unguarded moment before the wagon had gotten clear of the range.

She had been taken a prisoner, while her father—Joe

shuddered to think what must have been his fate, since he knew what crimes these villains had perpetrated since they first became the terror of the district.

The Maitland outfit must have been taken possession of by the rascals, though the boy saw no signs of it.

He accounted for this in a measure by the fact that the defile was too narrow to admit the passage of the "schooner," but they could have brought the horses into the valley, and whatever plunder the vehicle contained.

Whatever they had done with the horses, or the contents of the wagon, neither was in sight.

That fact hardly created a doubt in Joe's mind as to the fate of the wagon and Mr. Maitland, for he could not see how they could get away with Jess without overcoming her father as well, since the mining man would naturally fight to the last gasp in defense of his child.

Joe's first impulse was to rush forth and attempt the rescue of the girl at any cost, but a moment's reflection convinced him that he would only throw his life away to no purpose in an open fight against the odds he must face.

It behooved him, therefore, to watch and wait for a fitting opportunity to rescue both Sam and the girl.

He saw that Hurley was arguing with and threatening Jess Maitland.

As far as he could make out, the girl resented his conduct in a resolute way.

She did not appear to be overcome with terror, as most girls probably would have been under the circumstances, and Joe admired her apparent grit.

Whatever it was that Hurley was trying to accomplish, he was certainly not succeeding very well.

At one time he raised his fist as though he intended striking Jess, but reconsidered the matter.

When Joe saw his action, his eyes blazed with anger, and he raised his rifle to take aim at the scoundrel.

Had he struck the girl, Rushmore would certainly have thrown every other consideration to the winds and fired at him.

With the chances in favor of his missing the rascal, for Joe was not a practiced shot, this would have created a complication that might have resulted disastrously for the brave boy.

Fortunately, such a crisis was averted.

While Hurley was engaged with Jess his men went into the house, and presently Joe observed smoke issuing from the chimney.

As the sun indicated that the hour was about midday, the boy guessed that the men were preparing their dinner.

Hurley finally marched Jess back into the house, and immediately after one of the men appeared with a pail and started for the stream to get water.

After watching another half an hour and finding that the desperadoes remained in the house, Joe, beginning to feel hungry, went to his saddlebags and got out some bread and hard-boiled eggs, and returning to his post, made a light meal of them.

He had no means of quenching his thirst, however, and had to do without drink.

When he had finished the last crust he saw the three men come out with their pipes in their mouths, and squat down against the side of the house in the shade.

Soon after Hurley joined them, and the group smoked and talked for the best part of an hour.

Joe judged that they were talking about the mine, for Hurley had a paper in his hand, and he occasionally pointed toward the trees behind which the boy was observing his actions.

"I'm afraid I shall have a visit from those chaps soon," thought Joe, with some uneasiness.

His fears proved to be well founded, for after a time Hurley, accompanied by one of the rascals, started for the little grove.

Joe decided to take refuge inside the mine.

So he hastily retreated into the gorge, crossed the amphitheater where Thompson had erected his monuments of stone, and diving into the hole, made his way to the extreme end of the tunnel.

There he crouched and waited with beating heart for the coming of the two villains.

It was some time before he heard from them.

Then there was a noise at the entrance of the hole.

He could hear the distant sound of talk, and every moment he expected they would crawl into the tunnel.

They did not, however.

The fact of the matter was they had no means with them of producing a light, and to venture inside in the dark struck them as being productive of no good results.

Having satisfied themselves that they had found the mine, they went away, and after some time Joe ventured to make his way out again into the amphitheater.

He remained around the tunnel entrance for more than an hour, thinking that the rascals must have discovered his burro tied in the grove and set a watch for the owner of the animal.

At length he grew tired of inaction, and cautiously took his way through the gorge and reached the trees without mishap.

Looking for the burro, he was delighted to see that Hurley and his companion had not been observant enough to notice it where it was hidden among the trees.

"They haven't the least idea that they are being spied upon," thought Joe. "That is fortunate for me, and I hope for Sam and Miss Jess also. Maybe I'll be able to rescue them to-night if the rascals don't set a watch."

When the boy looked toward the house again he saw the four villains loafing in front of the building smoking and talking.

"I suppose they're figuring on what they're going to do about the mine, now that they know where it is. It certainly couldn't be in a better situation for them to get out some of the rich ore of the lode without interference except from me. If I was not on hand to watch their actions, and ultimately to checkmate them, I hope, they could load the two burros with ore, carry it south and dispose of it at some smelter for cash. If they adopt that plan they will count on the security afforded by the seclusion of the valley, and the fact that their return to this locality is not yet suspected. Working the mine in that way promises results, as well as safety, for them, and I should be surprised if they don't attempt to put the scheme into operation," thought Joe, as he watched the men.

At any rate they were in no rush about doing anything at

the mine, for they did not revisit the amphitheater that afternoon.

With the setting of the sun the men set about getting their supper, and the sight of smoke coming out of the chimney reminded Joe that he had a good appetite himself.

He was also extremely thirsty, and would have given a good deal for a big drink of water.

There was no chance of his getting that till darkness afforded him the chance of sneaking down to the stream.

Then his burro was no doubt thirsty, too, and he would have to have water, if the boy had to turn him loose.

Joe ate some bread and two more hard-boiled eggs, of which a supply was in his saddlebags, while the uncooked rations had been stowed in Sam's bags, and then waited impatiently for darkness.

CHAPTER X.

JOE TO THE RESCUE.

As night fell upon the little valley, the gloom was deepened by masses of dark clouds that climbed the usually brilliant sky and hid the stars.

A moaning wind also swept through the mountains and made its presence felt in that secluded plain of grass.

The darker the night the better it suited Joe, for it favored his plan of operations.

The only light that came from the house was the fitful gleam of the fire in the open fireplace.

As soon as he was satisfied that the four men were inside the building, he unhitched the burro and led him along the edge of the pocket to the end of the promontory of rock that divided it from the adjacent pocket.

Then he headed for the stream.

After both had drunk as much as they wished of the cool, clear water, Joe decided not to take the burro back to the grove, where there was every chance of his being discovered next day if nothing came that night of the boy's efforts in behalf of the prisoners.

So he led the animal across the valley and tied him to a solitary small tree near the edge of the stream, where he could get both grass and water of his own accord.

There he left him and returned to the neighborhood of the house.

He wondered whether Jess Maitland was imprisoned in the room where the bed was, or whether she was up in the attic along with the unfortunate Sam.

He guessed that the attic would be regarded as the more secure place to hold the prisoners, since there was no way for them to leave except by way of the ladder in the kitchen, which the rascals could remove.

The door leading into the kitchen, which was the main room of the house, was open, and through it Joe caught a glimpse of the rascals seated near the fire.

He squatted out in the grass and waited for developments.

The wind from the mountains made the night cool for a midsummer one, but it was not so cool as to inconvenience the watcher.

Nearly two hours passed before the men showed any intention of turning in for the night, then Hurley withdrew to the inner room where the bed was, which satisfied Joe

that Jess was in the attic with Sam, and two of his comrades lay down near the fire.

The other man lit his pipe again, came to the door, and sitting down on the sill, began to smoke and ruminate.

That was a sign that a watch was to be kept, and Joe began to despair of being able to communicate with the prisoners.

Half an hour passed away and then the man got up and sauntered out toward Joe.

The boy crawled to one side and let him pass.

As he did so an idea occurred to Joe, and he determined to carry it out.

He followed after the rascal, who went as far as the stream to get a drink.

As he knelt down beside the water, Joe drew his revolver, crept upon him, and when within reach struck the fellow a heavy blow on the head.

He toppled over into the stream, unconscious.

Joe dragged him out, took his revolver from him, and left him.

Then he hastened back to the house and looked in at the door:

The two rascals inside were sound asleep.

In a corner stood two rifles.

Joe decided to remove them first of all.

He entered the room, which was illuminated only slightly by the dying fire, and slipping across the floor, secured the guns, and got outside with them.

He dropped them in the grass a short distance in the rear of the building and then went back.

The ladder had not been removed from its place in the corner near the fireplace, and Joe next determined to creep up it to the attic and try to get the prisoners out.

It was a ticklish job, as one or both of the sleeping men might wake up at the critical moment, discover him, and then there would be trouble.

The boy, however, determined to carry out his plan at any risk, and he entered the room again.

He had hardly gone a yard before one of the men rolled over and sat up.

Joe's watchful eye caught his first move and he hastily retreated into the room where Hurley lay asleep on the bed.

The man got up, stretched himself and went to the door.

Joe guessed he was looking for the watcher.

If he was he didn't see any signs of him.

He stepped outside and walked about, probably hunting for him, and no doubt surprised by his absence from his post.

He was away some time, during which interval Joe did not dare leave the inner room.

Finally he returned, but remained standing at the door for a good fifteen minutes.

Then he went and replenished the fire, and kicked his companion into wakefulness.

Joe heard them talking together and then saw them both go to the door.

The boy listened to their talk and heard them discussing the strange absence of the fellow whose duty it was to be on watch.

The fire, starting up again, began to dispel the shadows on which Joe depended largely to escape observation.

"Hello!" ejaculated one of the rascals, suddenly, "where are our guns?"

"In the corner, ain't they?" replied the other.

"No, they ain't. They're gone."

"Gone! Where would they go to?"

They looked about the room and found only the rifle belonging to the man who had been selected to stand the first watch.

"There's Hank's gun, but ours—where the deuce have they disappeared to?" said the fellow who called attention to the absence of the rifles from the corner.

"Hank couldn't have put them somewhere else, could he?" asked the other.

"What would he do that for? Where is he, anyhow? I don't like the looks of things. I'm goin' to wake the cap up."

That decision on his part placed Joe in an awkward predicament.

The man was coming into the inner room where he was, and if a light was thrown on the subject he would be discovered.

At this critical moment he thought of the bed.

Unslinging his rifle from his back he quickly crawled under it.

As he did so the man who had last spoken entered the room, and going to the bed, shook Hurley by the arm.

"What's the trouble now?" asked the chief of the small band, jumping to his feet.

"The trouble is that Hank, who was on watch, is nowhere about, and Bill's gun and mine are missin'."

Hurley uttered an imprecation and walked out of the room, followed by the other.

Joe heard the three men talking in an animated way in the outer room, and he wondered what would happen.

Leaving his rifle under the bed, he crept to the door and peered out.

He saw Hurley springing up the ladder with a grass torch in his hand.

In a moment he came down and announced that the prisoners were safe.

Then the three men had another talk, but couldn't make head nor tail out of the situation.

Finally they all went outside and began looking around.

Joe struck a match and inspected the inner room.

Hurley's rifle stood in a corner.

The boy took it and shoved it under the bed.

Taking possession of his own gun Joe went to the door of the room and listened.

He could hear the rascals talking outside.

At last their voices grew fainter as if they were walking further away and the boy took courage to slip to the outer door and peer outside.

He had to do this cautiously, because the light from the fire would have thrown his figure into relief against the darkness without.

He couldn't see the men in the gloom, nor could he hear their voices longer.

Trusting that they were now at some little distance, he crawled across the floor to the fire, kicked the blazing fuel partly out, and then darted up the ladder.

Striking a match, he saw the sleeping form of Sam close by.

Further on he saw Jess Maitland, wide awake.

"Miss Jess," he cried in a low tone, "don't be alarmed, it is I—Joe Rushmore—come to try and rescue you."

The girl recognized his voice, and his figure in the matchlight, and uttered an exclamation of joy.

"Time is precious," went on Joe. "Are you bound?"

"Yes. We both are," replied Jess.

"All right. I've got a knife."

He slipped over and cut her loose.

Then he cut the rope that held Sam's hands, and while he was doing it the lad awoke.

"What—what's—"

"Hush, Sam!" replied Joe, in the darkness. "Don't you know my voice? I'm Joe."

"Joe! Why, how did you get up here? Where are those men?"

"No matter now. Your hands are free, and your feet, too. Both of you follow me, quick. Here, Miss Jess, take this revolver. I took it from one of the rascals. You know how to use it, I guess. You take my shooter, Sam. Now come on."

He led the way down the ladder, and Sam and Jess followed him.

Another kick at the fire subdued it still further.

"Grab that rifle yonder, Sam."

Sam did so.

As they crossed the room toward the outer entrance Joe heard the voices of the men returning.

They were so close that it was impossible for the three young people to make their escape that way, so Joe hurried them into the inner room just in the nick of time, for in another moment Hurley entered the house, followed by the other two, supporting the injured Hank, whom Joe had knocked out over at the stream.

CHAPTER XI.

THE ESCAPE.

"Here, you, Bill, shake up that fire," said Hurley, as the two men assisted Hank to a chair. "Take another swaller of this licker, Hank, and brace up."

The rascal took the flask and swallowed a goodly portion.

"Now, then," said the leader, "let us know what happened to you."

"Blamed if I know what happened to me," replied Hank, in a dazed kind of way. "Somethin' struck me on the head, and that's all I remember."

"Somethin' struck yer, eh? What was it struck yer? And yer wet, too."

"Wet!" ejaculated Hank. "Me wet?"

"I should say yer was wet. Can't yer feel it? Yer must'r tumbled into the stream. Can't yer remember anythin' about what happened to yer? What was yer doin' down by the stream, anyway? Yer were told to watch round the house."

"I was thirsty and I went over to take a drink."

"Wasn't there good licker in the room?" demanded Hurley.

"I wanted water."

"Oh, yer did?" sarcastically. "Then I reckon yer got more'n yer wanted. So yer don't know what struck yer?"

"No, I don't."

"I s'pose yer don't know what happened to them two guns what stood in the corner, either?"

"What guns?"

"Bill's and Jack's."

"What do I know about their guns? Every man looks after his own."

"Wal, them two guns was in that corner when yer went on watch. When Jack woke up and found yer missin' he found the guns missin', too. There's somethin' crooked goin' on 'round this ranch, and I'm goin' to find out what it is."

"Hold on," said Bill, in some excitement.

"What's the matter?" said Hurley.

"When we three went out to look after Hank his gun was standin' ag'in the wall yonder. Now it's gone like the others. There's somethin' blamed mysterious goin' on. I wonder if this here shack is harnted."

"Haunted, you fool, of course not," snorted Hurley. "It's my opinion there's somebody 'round what's no bus'ness to be here. Take another look at the pris'ners, Jack."

Jack picked up a wad of dry grass, rolled it into a short torch, lighted it and sprang up the ladder.

Joe, Sam and Jess, who had easily overheard all that was going on in the room beyond, realized that there would be something doing in less than a minute.

"They're gone!" roared Jack, as soon as he had waved his torch in the attic.

"Ther pris'ners!" howled Hurley, with a terrible impation.

"Yes, the prisoners," replied Jack, silding down the ladder.

"That's all yer fault, Hank, for leavin' the house," raged the leader. "Somebody must hev follered us into this valley —thet gal's father mebbe got onto our trail—and laid low till after dark. I reckon it was he follered yer to the stream, Hank, and laid yer out with a rock or somethin'. Here, Jack, run out and see if they've taken the burros. If they hev they'll be out of the valley afore we kin ketch 'em."

Jack rushed out into the night to look for the animals.

"You take a look around the rear, Bill," continued Hurley, "and see what yer kin see. If they hadn't got away with our guns I reckon we'd be able to make matters interestin' for 'em. Now they've got one shot apiece to hold us off with, while we've only got our revolvers."

"They won't be able to do much with them guns in the dark," said Hank, who was himself again.

"The burros are all right," said Jack, sticking his head in at the door. "I've brought 'em up."

"Good enough," replied Hurley. "Wait till I git my gun, and we'll head 'em off at the entrance to the valley."

"He's coming in here," said Joe, to Sam and Jess. "I chucked his gun under the bed. We'll have to fight our way out."

Joe reversed his rifle and waited.

Hurley rushed into the room and felt in the corner for his weapon.

When he found it was gone he began to swear like a trooper.

"Fetch a light in here, Hank," he cried.

As he spoke Joe dashed forward and struck him down with the butt of his gun.

Hurley roared as he fell, the blow only being a glancing one.

"Follow me," exclaimed Joe to his companions.

They sprang out of the room with a rush, and dashed for the outer door, where the rascal Jack stood holding on to the burros.

He was taken so by surprise that the young people brushed by him before he thought of getting out his revolver.

Hank caught a fleeting glance of the three, but drew his weapon too late to use it.

Hurley staggered from the room with his face and head bleeding, and great confusion ensued.

At that moment Bill came up with the two rifles he had stumbled over in the grass.

Hurley ordered Jack to ride to the entrance of the valley and hold the escaped prisoners off.

Jack seized one of the rifles from Bill, mounted the sad-eyed burro, and hustled off toward the defile.

Hurley wiped the blood from his countenance and then roughly bound up his head, and while doing it he ordered Bill and Hank to scour the vicinity for their late prisoners.

In a few minutes he left the house and joined the pursuit himself.

In the meantime Joe led his companions over to the grove of trees.

"We'll stand them off from this place if they come here," he said. "Give that rifle to Miss Jess, Sam. She's a first-class shot."

Jess shoved the revolver Joe gave her into her belt and took the rifle.

Then the little party waited for developments.

"How came you to be captured, Miss Jess?" asked Joe. "How about your father?"

The girl explained that when their wagon was nearly out of the mountains she had gotten out to get a bunch of wild flowers.

While in the act of picking them she was suddenly surrounded and captured by the rascals.

One held her while the others rushed at the wagon to overpower her father.

At that moment the scoundrels saw a couple of horsemen approaching.

Taking alarm, Hurley swung her on his burro, and the whole party disappeared among the underbrush.

They hurried along a lonely trail as fast as they could, and after several hours' travel reached and entered the defile that communicated with the valley.

On reaching the stone house they saw Sam Short sleeping in the sun, with his burro tied near by.

They woke him up and made him a prisoner.

Jess said she had at first been confined in the room with the bed, but was afterward taken into the attic, where she found Sam bound hand and foot.

On being left alone with Sam she had asked him about Joe, and was told he was off hunting for the silver mine.

"We both expected nothing else than you would be caught on your return to the house and forced to share our imprisonment," the girl said. "As the hours passed away, and darkness came, we wondered where you could be. Finally Sam said he guessed you had seen the rascals at a distance, and that you had kept away to avoid trouble."

"That's exactly how it was," said Joe. "I had just found the mine and——"

"Did you really find the silver mine?" asked Jess, in a tone of excited interest.

"Where did you find it?" chipped in Sam.

"It's only a short distance from where we are standing now," answered Joe. "There is a gorge right behind this grove which leads into a kind of rocky amphitheater. The mine is in there, and from the little I know about silver ore I can tell you that it is a mighty rich property. A tunnel has been dug several hundred feet right into the mountain alongside the main lode. This mine has been worked by somebody a good while ago. Why such a rich lead should be abandoned, with thousands of dollars' worth of silver in sight, is a mystery that I can't see through. The original discoverer must have dropped dead before he could impart the knowledge of the mine to any one else. Well, as I was saying, I had just found the mine, and was returning to tell Sam the news, when I saw the four desperadoes hanging around the house. I knew at once that they had captured you, Sam, and that I would only be putting my head into the lion's jaws by showing myself. So I kept under cover and watched them through the trees of this grove. I saw Hurley, whom I easily recognized, bring you out of the house, Miss Jess. I was much startled to see that you were also a prisoner, and I feared that your father had been killed trying to defend you. I determined to do my best to rescue both you and Sam, after it got dark, and so far I have succeeded. There is very little chance that they'll be able to find us during the night, but when daylight comes I have no doubt but that they will make a strong effort to discover our whereabouts and try to do us up. They are now guarding the exit from this valley to prevent us from getting away in the dark. The defile is so narrow that we could not pass them without instant discovery. In the morning they will probably leave one man on guard there while the rest will scour the valley. If we remain here we must have provisions to stand a siege, so I think the best thing Sam and I can do now is to go back to the house while they are away and bring the other pair of saddlebags containing the bulk of our uncooked grub over here, together with anything else in the provision line that we can find in the building. The main trouble will be to secure water, for there is none to be had here that I know of. With a good supply of food and water we ought to be able to defy all their efforts to rout us out of this place, for the gorge is very narrow just behind these trees."

As Sam and Jess looked upon Joe as their leader and mainstay, whatever he suggested went as a matter of course.

Handing Jess his rifle in exchange for the revolver, and warning her to keep a bright lookout for the rascals, he and Sam left the shelter of the grove and made for the house with all due caution.

CHAPTER XII.

THE ENEMY REINFORCED.

"Keep your eyes skinned, Sam. No telling where most of the rascals are. With one on watch at the defile, the others may be quietly prowling around, hoping to pounce on us unawares," said Joe, as they drew near the house.

All was silent in that vicinity, and there was scarcely

any firelight in the building, which loomed before them like a dark blot in the gloom.

"Stand here at the corner, Sam, while I go inside. If you see or hear the least thing to arouse your suspicions give me instant warning. Understand?"

"Yep."

Joe glided into the kitchen.

Flashing a match he saw Sam's saddlebags lying in a corner, empty, the bundles of crackers, raw sliced bacon, and other provisions dumped out in a pile and showing signs of having been examined.

Joe hastily returned the stuff to the bags and flung them on the table.

He took possession of the half-filled flask of whiskey that Hurley had left behind in his excitement.

He dumped out the contents of a pair of saddlebags belonging to the rascals, and finding that it consisted mostly of provisions which they had brought with them, he shoved as much of it as he could get into Sam's bags.

Then slinging the bags over his shoulders he carried them out to his associate.

Returning to the room, he picked up the tin pail he had seen there, also the bundle of blankets and the few cooking utensils which had been part of the load Sam's burro carried.

With these articles he returned to his companion.

"Pick up the saddlebags and we'll return to the grove," said Joe.

Sam did so, and they reached the shelter of the trees where Jess was standing without seeing a sign of the desperadoes.

Joe's next effort was to obtain a supply of water.

He went off alone with the pail, bound for the little stream.

He reached it without mishap, filled the pail brimming full and made his way back in safety.

"We are now prepared to stand a siege for a few days, at any rate," he said to his companions. "This water is our most precious property. We'll have to use it sparingly if we remain here. To-morrow one of us had better search all about the amphitheater and see whether there's water to be had within reach. Now, Miss Jess, you can take one of the blankets, roll yourself up in it and go to sleep on the grass. Sam and I will stand watch by turns all night."

The girl declared that she was too excited to sleep, but Joe insisted that she lie down anyway and rest herself.

She obeyed, and then Joe and Sam removed all their goods to the amphitheater.

The water pail they covered up and placed in a hole among the rocks.

What Hurley and his minions were doing all this time the young people had not the least idea.

All they knew was that they did not see, nor hear from, them in any way.

Night passed slowly away, Joe and Sam maintaining an alternate watch, and morning dawned bright and clear.

Joe climbed up among the rocks where he could get a sweeping view of the valley, and looked around for signs of the desperadoes.

He saw the whole bunch seated near the entrance to the defile.

As he looked three of them, two mounted on the burros, started in the direction of the stone house.

Tethering the animals on their arrival at the building, they walked inside.

They came out almost immediately and began looking around.

"They've discovered the loss of the grub and I'll bet they're as mad as hornets," chuckled Joe, as he watched them talk and gesticulate.

Finally two of the men went back into the house, leaving Hurley walking up and down in front of the door.

"They're going to feed on what I couldn't take away last night," thought Joe. "There isn't more than enough to last them through the day. I wonder what they'll do for fodder when that's gone?"

Joe returned to his companions.

"You and Sam had better cook some breakfast," he said to Jess. "I'll keep watch while you're doing it. Hurley and two of his crowd are back at the house. There's smoke coming from the chimney, so I guess they're cooking the remnant of their supplies for breakfast."

Jess attended to the cooking herself, Sam merely lending a hand.

When the meal was ready Sam came to where Joe was watching among the trees and said he'd watch while Rushmore was getting something to eat, so Joe joined Jess.

"Your father is, of course, hunting for you," he said to the girl. "He would have followed those rascals to this valley, only he must have lost track of them completely. As he knows Sam and I started for this place, I should not be surprised to see him come here for the purpose of getting us to join him in his search."

"Poor father!" murmured the girl. "I know he is terribly worried about me. He never will leave the range till he finds me. No doubt those two horsemen, whose coming probably saved my father's life when the men were on the point of attacking the wagon after they had captured me, will help him to track the villains to this valley."

"I hope so, for if they come here we'll join them and make things hot for the villains. It is about time that Hurley was wiped off the earth. I might have killed him myself last night when he entered the inner room for his rifle, but it goes against me to shoot a man when he's off his guard. It looks too much like murder."

"Father will be deeply grateful to you for rescuing me from those men. I am more grateful myself than I can express. You are a brave boy, and I shan't never forget what I owe you as long as I live."

The look that accompanied the words made Joe's heart beat quicker than usual.

There is no use disguising the fact that he greatly admired this lovely girl, and he was delighted that circumstances had enabled him to do her a signal service.

"You are more than welcome to what I did for you, Miss Jess," he replied, earnestly. "I should have tried to save you even had I lost my life in the attempt."

She gave him one swift glance out of her beautiful eyes and then looked down, her cheeks flushing deeply under his admiring gaze.

"Well," said Joe, "I'll have to go and relieve Sam."

He rose from the stone which had served him for a seat and walked out into the gulley.

Jess looked after him as he strode away.

He seemed to be her ideal of vigorous young manhood.

"He said he would have sacrificed his life to save me had that been necessary," she murmured. "How brave and noble, and handsome he is! If I only had a brother like him how I should love him!"

Quite unconscious of the impression he had made on Jess Maitland, Joe walked through the gulley and rejoined the owner of the sad-eyed burro.

"Anything doing, Sam?" he asked.

"Nope. They hain't stirred from the house since you went to eat."

"All right. Now go and get your own breakfast."

"I've been wonderin' what you did with your burro. I don't see him around."

"I took him across the valley last night, and staked him near the stream, where he could get water as well as grass."

"Oh, you did," said Sam, and then, without another word, he walked off.

In a few minutes Hurley and his two men came out of the house.

One of them jumped on a burro and started off for the defile.

"He's gone to relieve the chap on watch there," said Joe to himself.

His surmise was correct, for inside of a quarter of an hour the other man came riding back on the burro.

After exchanging a few words with Hurley, the fellow entered the house.

While Joe was wondering what the ruffians intended to do he was rejoined by both Sam and Jess.

"Hurley and two of his crowd are still at the house," said Joe to the girl. "I suppose they'll get busy presently."

As he spoke Hurley and the man who was talking to him turned and looked up the valley as if something interested them in that direction.

Joe and his companions could not see what they were looking at, owing to the fact that the semi-circular pocket of rocks hemmed in their line of vision.

"There's something doing," said Joe, in a tone of interest. "I'm going to climb up on the rocks and take a squint. You two can come along also, as those chaps won't be able to see you, since we shall do our climbing inside the gorge."

Leaving the trees Sam and Jess followed Joe.

He led them up a precipitous pathway to the point he had reached earlier that morning when he took his view of the valley.

As they glanced out over the grassy plain they saw three men on burros riding briskly toward the house.

The animals were laden with heavy saddlebags, and the men carried rifles slung across their backs.

At the first glance Joe thought they were Jess' father and the two horsemen whose appearance in the nick of time had frightened the rascals from attacking the wagon, and his heart gave a bound of excited satisfaction.

A moment later, however, the disagreeable truth forced itself upon him—these three new arrivals were members of Hurley's gang, which now numbered seven.

They were bringing up supplies, badly needed by the rascals at that moment, and their appearance was welcomed by Hurley with the greatest of satisfaction.

Their coming to the valley showed that Hurley had known of the place before he came there the day before, and the valley had been appointed as a rendezvous when the gang was scattered.

With the enemy reinforced by men and supplies the prospect was altered very much for the worse for the three young people who were practically bottled up in the valley.

CHAPTER XIII.

BEATING A STEALTHY RETREAT.

The newcomers rode up to the house and dismounted.

They were evidently warmly greeted by Hurley and his comrade.

A conference ensued, and while they were talking they were joined by the man who had been in the house.

The burros were stripped of their freight, which was taken into the house, and the animals tethered with the other two.

One of the rascals was left to guard the building, and then the other five started toward the young people's retreat.

"We've got to fight them off now if we can," said Joe, feeling that the situation was a critical one. "They have four rifles among them, while we have but two. It is fortunate that the cartridges your father gave me, Miss Jess, fits the rifle Sam brought away from the house. We have got to keep under cover and not open fire on the rascals till we're sure of hitting them. Remember, Miss Jess, that you mustn't think of sparing those fellows, for your fate would not be a pleasant one if they got you into their power again."

Their position enabled them to command the narrow entrance to the gorge, and the distance between them and that point was so short that they could hardly fail to hit a man every time one showed himself at the opening.

They watched Hurley and his companions as they advanced toward the trees.

They soon reached the little grove and were lost in it.

"I'll take the first shot," said Joe, with his eyes on the entrance to the gorge.

In a few minutes the enemy appeared at the opening, Hurley in advance.

As the rascal entered the gorge, closely followed by one of his men, Joe's rifle rang out on the morning air.

Hurley staggered forward and sank down on the rocks.

Then Jess fired and the second man fell.

Sam discharged his revolver at the third fellow, and the bullet barely missed him.

The other two men who were on the point of following dodged back out of sight.

The rascal fired at by Sam seized Hurley and dragged him out of the gorge.

The man shot by Jess lay quite still.

Joe and the girl put fresh cartridges in their rifles and waited for a further move on the part of their enemies.

They were holding a consultation out of sight, and for fifteen minutes nothing developed.

At the end of that time the three unwounded ruffians were seen coming out of the grove carrying Hurley between them.

Jess could easily have shot one or more of them before

they could have reached the house with their burden, but she did not want to do it.

"Sam," said Joe, "get down there and see if that chap is dead or only wounded. Take charge of his gun and his cartridge belt, and take away any other weapons he may have about him."

The boy lost no time in obeying Joe's orders.

He found that the chap had been stunned by the ball, which had cut a furrow on the side of his head.

He took his arms away and reported the facts to Joe.

Rushmore then joined Sam and between them they bound the rascal, carried him into the amphitheater, and left him to recover his senses at his leisure.

While they were doing this Jess remained on the rocks watching.

Hurley was carried into the house and while one of the gang was attending to him the others gathered in a group outside and canvassed the situation.

It is certain that they did not relish the warm reception they had received in the gorge, and they were figuring how they could even matters up.

After disposing of the wounded rascal Joe and Sam rejoined the girl.

"I guess those fellows won't be in a hurry to renew their attack on us," said Rushmore. "If they do we'll make them still more sick of the job."

"They may wait till night comes and then try to creep in on us," said Jess.

"I think it is more likely that they will attempt to get at us by climbing up the rocks," said Joe.

"We wouldn't be able to see them in the dark," replied Jess.

"If it should be a fine, starry night we could see their figures. At any rate, if we couldn't see them they could hardly see us, either."

Jess was bothered about his burro.

He didn't like the idea of his animal being in the hands of the enemy.

If the rascals should happen to take a notion to abandon the valley he had little doubt but that they would carry the burro away with them.

He had a decided objection to losing the sad-eyed beast, because he regarded the animal as an old friend that could not, in his estimation, be replaced.

No further move was made against the young people by the desperadoes that morning, but a close watch was maintained by them on the rocks behind the trees.

Hurley was evidently badly wounded, for he did not reappear from the house.

"I'll bet they feel pretty sore over their defeat," remarked Joe. "They wouldn't do a thing to us if they could catch us. They're a mighty bad lot."

Jess prepared dinner soon after noon without any assistance from Sam, other than to start the fire.

Joe and the girl partook of it first, Sam remaining on watch.

Then Rushmore and Jess relieved Short.

As the afternoon wore away, and the ruffians did not renew their attack, Joe was more certain than ever that they were holding off for darkness.

"If the night should turn out to be tolerably dark," he said, "like last night, for instance, I should be in favor of

making a move down the valley and forcing our way through the defile. We could put the one man on watch there out of business before he knew what was about to happen, and then we would start for Silver Creek. On our arrival there I'd put the sheriff up to the whereabouts of the remnants of the Hurley gang and Hurley himself, and a posse would take the road for this valley in very short order. Sam and I would go out with it in order to look your father up, Miss Jess, while you would remain at the hotel till we got back."

"We couldn't walk twenty-five miles," objected Sam, who wasn't accustomed to that kind of exercise.

"I guess you could if you had to, Sam."

"Ho!" cried Sam, shutting up like a clam.

Close on to sundown Joe, who had several plans in his mind, one or the other of which he intended to put in operation according as circumstances shaped affairs told Jess to prepare supper.

After it was eaten, he said to the girl:

"Prepare a small package of grub for you to carry for yourself, Miss Jess. Sam and I will fill our pockets with crackers and hard-boiled eggs. Then, if the night suits, we'll carry out my idea of leaving the valley."

As dusk fell on the landscape the evening promised to be a fair one, but still Joe believed that they could afford to take the chances of carrying out his idea.

About an hour after dark they left the gorge and took up their station among the trees.

Here they waited patiently for some move in their direction on the part of the desperadoes.

Hour after hour passed, until eleven o'clock came, and still nothing happened.

Leaving his rifle with Sam, Joe started out on a tour of observation.

Crawling slowly through the grass, he arrived within a short distance of the house.

Then from a portion of the conversation he overheard among the Hurleyites he found that they had determined to start out presently, climb the rocks at a certain point and try to surprise the little party that had given them such a lively five minutes at the gorge that morning.

Joe immediately returned to his companions and told them to follow him.

He led the way into the shadow of the rocky spur enclosing the pocket.

The dark background against which they were passing concealed their movements from the ruffians, who, not expecting such a retreat on their part, did not keep much of a watch on the valley.

When the rascals, four in number, well armed, set out by a roundabout way for the rocks that they proposed to climb, Joe and his companions saw them go.

The rascals did not consider it necessary to leave any one to watch the house, or even to look after their wounded leader, who lay on the bed in the inner room of the building, chafing at his condition like a caged beast.

"Now," palpitated Joe, as the ruffians vanished in the gloom, "let's see where the burros are. My plan is to recover Sam's animal, also my own, where I left it on the other side of the valley, and take a third for your use, Miss Jess. Then we'll be able to ride to Silver Creek instead of walking the distance. This will be a much pleasanter way

for us to proceed, and will save a whole lot of time, which is of more importance under the circumstances."

The proposal of Joe's to take the burros was hailed by Sam with great satisfaction.

They found the five animals staked together.

Sam picked out his own beast and mounted him, while Joe helped Jess on another!

Then he walked between them, leading the way across the valley to the spot where he had left Mr. Hathaway's animal securely tied near the stream.

The burro was there, all right, and he got into the saddle with as much pleasure as Sam had got into his.

CHAPTER XIV.

BESIEGED IN THE CABIN.

They turned their faces up the trail in the direction that would take them out of the range at the point where Joe and Sam had entered it.

"Your father must have been fooled by a false trail into going some distance on a wrong scent," said Joe to Jess.

"I'm afraid so," replied the girl, with a concerned look.

"We had such a strenuous time of it in the valley that you didn't get a chance to see the silver mine, though it lay within a few yards of where you cooked our meals in the amphitheater," said Joe. "However, there will be plenty of chances for you to get a look at it later. I shall want your father to take charge of it for me, and I have no doubt that I will have no trouble making arrangements with him after he sees the richness of the lode."

"He will do anything in the world for you, Mr. Rushmore, when he learns how you saved me from those desperadoes," replied the girl.

"It is a great satisfaction to me that I was able to do it, Miss Jess," replied Joe. "Anybody, however, would have done the same, so I don't think I am entitled to any especial credit."

"I don't know," answered the girl, "that anybody would have risked his life like you did in behalf of one who was almost a stranger to him."

"He'd be a pretty poor specimen of a man who wouldn't stand by any unprotected girl in distress," replied Joe, emphatically.

"There's the cabin," interjected Sam, at this juncture, pointing to the building where he and Joe first met Jess Maitland and her father and breakfasted with them.

The moon, which was now rising above the mountain peaks, threw a shaft of light athwart the little uninhabited dwelling.

At that moment Joe's sharp ears detected the sound of horses' feet upon the trail behind them.

"There are some persons overhauling us. For fear they might happen to be the desperadoes who have discovered our escape from the valley and are on our track, we had better seek temporary shelter in the cabin," he said.

The three young people started their burros ahead at a faster pace, and soon reached the cabin.

"We'll take the burros inside with us," said Joe, "so there'll be no evidence that anyone is around the place."

The door, of course, was not fastened, and Joe flung it open for his companions to enter and lead their animals with them.

He was the last to enter himself.

His burro, however, drove his hoof through a knothole and stuck fast.

"Come here, Sam, quick, and help me get the animal's foot out of this hole."

After considerable difficulty they freed the burro, and shoved him into the room.

Before this was effected and the door closed the oncoming party of horsemen came in sight.

Jess, who was looking out of the one small window facing the trail, gave a little startled cry.

"It's the desperadoes," she exclaimed. "There are six of them, two mounted on each burro, and they know that we are here!"

"Then we'll have to stand them off the best way we can," said Joe, in a determined tone, as he placed the bar in position across the door. "Look to the back door in the other room, Sam. If there isn't a bar, secure it in some way."

The desperadoes quickly dismounted from their burros and prepared to attack the cabin.

The moonlight, however, rendered their movements discernible.

"No use waiting for them to begin operations, Miss Jess," said Joe, unslinging his rifle from his back. "Fire away at them, for we know what their intentions are."

The sharp crack of the girl's weapon awoke the echoes of the mountains and was followed by a cry from one of the rascals, who threw up his hands and staggered back against the rocks on the other side of the trail.

A chorus of imprecations and threats followed Jess's shot.

The hot reception they were getting caused all the villains to seek the first shelter at hand, and soon their rifles began ringing out, and bullet after bullet came whizzing through the little window.

The rascals kept up a rapid fire on the window for a while, under cover of which half of their number moved around to the rear of the cabin.

The little party soon found themselves practically surrounded, and things began to wear a desperate look for the besieged.

The windows in the back of the house were covered by thick shutters which Joe did not dare open in order to discover what the enemy was doing in that quarter.

The firing ceased when it was not returned by those inside the cabin, and the ruffians, slinking from rock to rock, approached to the very edge of the open space surrounding the building.

At Joe's suggestion he and Sam got their jackknives out and began to make small openings between the logs for observation purposes.

As fast as these holes were made—one in each of the four sides of the cabin—Jess was instructed to look out through them and take note of what was going on.

The girl was finally stationed at the hole in the inner room, while Joe and Sam made use of the three in the large outer room, or kitchen.

For a time all remained quiet outside—three of the rascals were seen to be at one end of the cabin, among the rocks, and two at the other.

The besieged heard them exchanging suggestions across the intervening space.

They were figuring on how to force an entrance to the cabin.

Finally Joe, looking through the chink he had made in the rear wall, saw four of the scoundrels bringing a big log out into the open.

Evidently they intended to use it as a battering-ram upon the back door.

They did not begin the attack right away, but, after placing the log on the ground, withdrew behind the shelter of a big rock.

- At first Joe did not understand their motive in delaying operations until it occurred to him that they were waiting for the moon to get behind the range so that the cabin and clearing would be plunged into gloom.

The man that Jess had hit at the first fire lay at the edge of the trail, evidently badly wounded.

He was not dead, for he was seen to raise one arm occasionally.

"What are the skunks up to, anyway?" asked Sam, when Joe came back to the outer room. "Why don't they attack us?"

"I guess they're holding off for the moon to set so we can't get a good shot at them. It is evident to me from the looks of that log they brought and left at the edge of the clearing that they intend to use it as a battering-ram on the back door. One or two good blows will smash the door in, and then it will be a hand-to-hand fight to stand them off."

Joe, however, was not discouraged by the prospect.

He felt that the moment the door went down the rascals would offer a good mark, for they would be bunched around the log.

"We ought to be able to down three, or two, at any rate, at the first fire, which would leave but three at the most, and then with our revolvers we should make it so hot for them that they'll draw off and skip," thought Joe.

As the moon sank behind the mountain range Joe saw the rascals come from behind the rock, four of them, and take up the heavy log between them.

The crisis was at hand.

CHAPTER XV.

THE END OF THE FIGHT.

Rushmore immediately called Jess from the inner room and hastily told her what was about to happen.

"The moment the door gives way they'll drop the log and rush in on us. We must cover the opening with our rifles, and fire the instant they appear! After that we will have to rely on our revolvers. Everything depends on the accuracy of our aim. If more than one gets past the door our fate may be sealed. It is now a question of life and death with us."

With their rifles poised ready to shoot, Joe and his two companions awaited the attack with beating hearts.

It came in a moment.

Crash!

The door shivered under the impact of the heavy log against it.

But it didn't give way, for the timbers and hinges were stout, and the bar held it pretty firm.

Bang!

The concussion came against the lower section of the door and it partly gave way, the bottom hinge coming off.

Smash!

The third attempt of the rascals was pretty successful, and the door hung in ruins.

One final thrust only was needed to clear the way for the desperadoes, and the door went completely to pieces.

Down went the log and then Joe fired at one of the figures.

Simultaneously with his shot came a flash from behind a rock commanding the doorway and a bullet whizzed by the boy's ear.

At that moment the entrance was filled by the inrushing rascals.

Crack! Crack! blazed the rifles of Jess and Sam, and two men went down headlong on the floor.

Crack! went Joe's revolver and a third man staggered back.

The fourth man fired his revolver in the direction of the flash and Joe felt a hot sting on his head.

Crack! Jess' revolver sent the last man in the doorway to the ground with a bullet in his breast.

The man who had fired from behind the rock came dashing up, only to be met with a fusillade which bowled him over like a ninepin.

Thus, in the space of a couple of minutes, the fight had been won.

Five scoundrels lay writhing in agony about the doorway.

The room was clouded with smoke by this time, which was wafted out at the window.

Joe went forward, revolver in hand, to investigate.

One of the desperadoes, less seriously wounded than the others, raised his revolver and fired at the boy.

Joe dodged just in time to escape the bullet.

"Throw down your gun, or I'll fire!" cried *Joe*, covering the rascal.

The ruffian had no alternative but to obey or take the consequences.

With an imprecation he dropped his weapon.

Joe stepped over the others and picked it up, tossing it into the room.

Calling Sam to help him, he started to pull the villains away from the door.

Two of them seemed to have little life in them.

The other three groaned and swore as they were dragged aside.

At this juncture the two boys were startled by the appearance of three more men on the scene.

They grabbed their revolvers, ready to sell their lives dearly, for they saw that the newcomers had their weapons in their hands ready for business.

In another instant there would have been probably fatal pistol play in the gloom, but at that critical moment *Joe* recognized Jess' father, who was in advance, by his white hair.

"*Mr. Maitland!*" he cried.

"*Ha!*" cried the mining man. "Is that you, *Joe Rushmore?*"

At the sound of his voice Jess rushed from the doorway of the cabin, exclaiming, "Father! Father!"

In another instant the white-haired man had the girl clasped in his arms.

"My gracious, young fellers!" ejaculated one of the newcomers, "you've had quite a battle here."

"I should say that we had," replied *Joe*. "We've been besieged three hours in the cabin by half a dozen of the desperadoes who carried Miss Maitland away. They finally forced the door, but we managed to lay them out by quick firing."

"Did you young chaps beat them off yourselves?"

"Yes, with Miss Maitland's help. She can shoot as good as any man. She knocked out one fellow down by the trail."

"We saw him. He's a subject for the coroner, I guess, and a couple of these men are, too. You must have had a lively time of it."

"We did, while it lasted, which wasn't long."

"We heard the firing and came on to investigate. We've been hunting the rascals through the mountains since the young lady was carried off. How does it happen that she is with you?"

"I'll tell you the story after a while. Something ought to be done for these wounded rascals."

"They don't deserve any consideration. They ought to be lynched. However, the sheriff will see that they get their deserts. Which one is Hurley?"

"He's not here," replied *Joe*.

"That's a pity," replied the man. "He's the king-pin of them all."

"I know where he is. I wounded him yesterday morning in a fight we had with the gang soon after I rescued Miss Maitland. He's alone in a house in a secluded valley not far from here, and if you want to take charge of him I'll lead you to the place."

"We're ready to do that. It's time he was put where he won't do any more harm."

Mr. Maitland now came forward and grasped *Joe* by the hand.

"My daughter has just been telling me how you saved her from those desperadoes at the risk of your life. Believe me, *Rushmore*, I cannot find words sufficient to fittingly express my gratitude. I am under a life-long obligation to you, and shall endeavor to repay you in some manner for my dear child's safety."

"I hope you won't worry yourself about repaying me, *Mr. Maitland*. I only did my duty, and I am glad that I succeeded in doing your daughter, and yourself, a service. I hope you will let the matter go at that."

Mr. Maitland, however, insisted that *Joe* was entitled to some recognition for his gallant and plucky conduct.

"Your friendship and that of your daughter is all the recognition I want," replied *Joe*, cheerfully.

"Then you may be sure we are your friends for life," answered the mining man.

At that moment Jess noticed that there was blood on *Joe's* hair, and with a cry of concern she said:

"*Joe, Joe, you are wounded!*"

"A mere scratch, I guess," he replied, his heart giving a bound of pleasure at her calling him by his first name.

He put his hand to his head and brought it away covered with blood.

"*Oh!*" exclaimed the girl, in consternation. "Do sit down and let me see where you were hit."

He permitted her to examine his head, and she saw that a bullet had raised a bloody furrow just above his ear.

"You have had a narrow escape," she said, seriously. "Come down to the stream and I will wash and bind up your wound the best I can under the circumstances."

He accompanied her to the mountain rill, and though the injury was beginning to be painful, he seemed to feel only the gentle touch of her fingers as she bathed the inflamed and lacerated flesh, and bound the wound up with her handkerchief.

"Thank you, Jess," he said, taking one of her hands in his when she was done. "You are very good. I wish—you were my sister."

Jess blushed to the eyes, as he squeezed her hand, and looked down on the ground.

"We're going to be the best of friends, aren't we, and I may call you Jess after this and you will call me just Joe? Do you agree?"

"Yes," she replied, softly.

"That's right. I want to know you better because—well, no matter, because we have been in trouble together, and I have taken an interest in you. I never met a girl before that I liked as much as you, and I don't—well, I don't want to lose you—that is, lose sight of you."

She made no reply, but he saw that she did not attempt to withdraw her hand from his grasp.

"Do you like me, Jess?" he asked, eagerly.

"Yes," she answered, after a pause.

There was something in the word that seemed to mean a whole lot, and Joe, whose wounded head was throbbing and burning fiercer and fiercer every moment, looked into her half-averted face.

What he thought he saw there even in the gloom caused him to encircle her waist with his arm.

The excitement of the moment sent the blood bounding to his head.

A roaring and buzzing filled his ears as he tried to draw her unresisting form toward him.

Everything grew black before his eyes, and he seemed to be floating off somewhere far away from the scene of the night's fight.

Then, faintly, as from a distance, he heard the voice of Jess crying:

"Joe, Joe, don't die—please don't die, for my sake! Oh, Joe, I love you—I love you—I love you!"

Then he became entirely unconscious.

CHAPTER XVI.

CONCLUSION.

When Joe Rushmore came to his senses he was surprised to find himself lying on a bed in a small furnished room, with the afternoon sunshine shining in at the window.

"Why, how did I get here, and what is the matter with me? I feel as weak as a cat. I——"

A fair, sylph-like form bent over him, and a cool, soft hand rested gently on his forehead.

"Jess," he murmured. "You here?"

"Yes."

"Where am I?"

"In Silver Creek."

"Silver Creek?" he murmured, in a puzzled way.

"Yes. Father brought you here in the wagon. Don't you remember that you were wounded in the head during the fight with the desperadoes at the cabin?"

"Yes, so I do."

"You went with me down to the mountain rill where I bathed your hurt and bound it up with my handkerchief."

"I remember that, too."

"Then you suddenly fainted. I was dreadfully alarmed, for I thought you were dying, and I called——"

"You called——" said Joe, faintly, as his mind recalled her words, like the words of a half-forgotten dream.

"My father," she said, with a flush.

"I thought—I thought——"

His voice died away to a whisper.

"There, there," she said. "You mustn't try to talk. You are too weak."

She brought him a spoonful of medicine, which he swallowed simply because she held it to his lips, not because he realized why he needed it.

Next day Joe felt a little stronger and better, and then Jess, who remained with him the greater part of the daytime, told him all that happened after he fainted by the side of the stream.

He learned that two of the desperadoes died before the wagon was brought up for their removal, and that the others were now under a doctor's care in the town jail.

Sam had guided the two men, who accompanied Mr. Maitland in his search for his daughter, to the house in the valley, where they found the wounded Hurley all alone, impatiently awaiting the return of his gang.

His wound was not so serious but he was able to be carried a prisoner on horseback to Silver Creek, where he was now awaiting trial for his many crimes.

We may as well remark here that in due time, when the wounded rascals recovered, they were duly tried, convicted and received their quietus in public at the ends of hempen nooses, and the community was well rid of them forever.

Soon after Jess had brought everything up to date for Joe, Sam walked into the room and shook hands with his wounded comrade.

"Glad to see you're comin' around," he said, with a cheerful grin. "How do you feel to-day?"

"Weak, but better," replied Joe.

Joe improved steadily from that time, and in a week was able to be out of bed for part of the day.

Jess had already told her father about Joe's discovery of the silver mine in the secluded valley, and the first day that the boy was up Mr. Maitland came into his room to have a talk with him about it.

Joe had previously told the mining man about everything that had happened in the valley from the moment he and Sam entered it till they left it in company with Jess, with the single exception of his finding the mine in the rocky amphitheater.

He now told him the story of the mine itself, from the odd meeting with his father's old friend, Zeke Thompson; how the old prospector, finding himself dying, had willed him all his rights in the discovery, and given him full directions, with a diagram, how to find it; how, after he and Sam had parted with him and his daughter, they had easily found the valley, and how, leaving Sam at the stone house, he had continued the search for the mine and found it.

He told Mr. Maitland how rich in silver ore it appeared to be, what his plans were in respect to securing a legal claim to it, and how he hoped to interest him in the working of it.

"I want you to go and look at it as soon as I am able to get about, Mr. Maitland. I am satisfied you will find that it bears out all I have said about its richness as a mining proposition, and I hope you will help me work it to advantage," said Joe.

"I am entirely at your service in this matter, Rushmore," replied Mr. Maitland. "I owe you a debt of gratitude I can never wholly repay, and if I can be of assistance to you in developing this property I will gladly do so."

"Thank you, sir," replied the boy. "I am willing to give you a good interest in the mine in return for your services."

"We will talk about that some other time—after I have inspected the property and sized up its possibilities. In any case you can depend on my doing the right thing by you, for my daughter's sake, as well as my own."

A week later Joe was himself again.

He, Sam, Mr. Maitland and Jess, who insisted on accompanying them, started for the mountain range en route for the valley and the silver mine.

They made the journey on burros, with a fifth one loaded with supplies.

Sam's beast could no longer be called sad-eyed.

He had improved wonderfully in flesh and in spirits since his master became acquainted with Joe Rushmore.

But he still had the habit of wigwagging his ears on occasions when he was especially pleased at anything, or seemed to be curiously inclined.

The party made the stone house in the pocket of the valley their headquarters, and Jess was appointed by acclamation as boss of the culinary department.

Mr. Maitland was astonished at what he saw in the mine, and declared that it was uncommonly rich.

He agreed to take full charge of the working of it as soon as Joe had established his legal right to the property.

It was settled that the mine was to be worked secretly, for a time, by the three now interested in its development, in order to get the funds necessary to begin more extensive operations.

In order to prevent the news leaking out in Silver Creek the ore was to be carried to a smelter on the south side of the range.

Mr. Maitland attended to putting Joe's claim through the proper legal channels.

Then a company was formed, with a million shares at a par value of \$1.

Joe retained 501,000 shares; Mr. Maitland got 150,000 shares; Sam and Jess received 50,000 shares each; and the balance, or 249,000, was offered to the public at the best figure obtainable over 25 cents a share.

Sufficient money was raised to install the necessary machinery and pay labor, and the mine branched out at once as a producer.

Its stock immediately went to par, for the richness of the ore was undisputed.

Joe, of course, had himself elected president of the company, which was known as "The Secluded Valley Silver

Mining Co.," and Mr. Maitland was elected vice-president and general manager.

Sam Short was provided with a sinecure at the mine to prevent him from wandering around the country as of yore, which he undoubtedly would have done, notwithstanding the fact that he was now worth \$50,000.

His burro had nothing to do now but meander about the valley, eating the grass and drinking from the stream, and, as a consequence, he grew fat and lazy.

Sometimes when Joe, or Jess, or his master, spoke to him, he would look up and wigwag his ears solemnly to and fro, but otherwise they never moved any more—the exertion had become too strenuous for him.

One warm summer evening, a year after the mine had been in operation, Joe and Jess were walking together, as they often did, around the edge of the valley.

Finally they sat down on a smooth rock and Joe put his arm around the girl, as he had gotten into the habit of doing.

"I've got something to tell you, Jess, that's been in my mind ever since that night I fainted away at the cabin after I was shot. When everything had turned black before my eyes, and I seemed to be floating away in space, your voice seemed to come to me from a great distance. This is what you said: 'Joe, Joe, don't die—please don't die, for my sake! Oh, Joe, I love you—I love you—I love you!' Did you actually say that, Jess?"

The girl blushed crimson and hid her face in her hands.

"You know I love you, dear, and I want to know if you really love me. If you said those words that night I shall know that you have loved me from the first. Is it so, Jess?"

"Yes, it is so. I did speak those words, but I never dreamed that you heard them."

"And you love me well enough to become my wife, Jess?"

"Yes. I love you with all my heart, and have from the moment I first saw you."

Next day Joe asked Mr. Maitland for his daughter's hand, and the answer he got was favorable, as a matter of course.

To-day Joe Rushmore is rated as one of the silver kings of Colorado.

He lives with his wife in a splendid mansion in Denver.

And he lays all his good fortune to the fact that he was STRANDED OUT WEST.

THE END.

Read "BEN BASSFORD'S LUCK; OR, WORKING ON WALL STREET TIPS," which will be the next number (116) of "Fame and Fortune Weekly."

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GOOD STORIES.

An incident in Roman history, well authenticated, would seem to indicate that aluminum, instead of being new, may be only another new discovery of an old process.

It is related by Pliny that during the reign of the Emperor Tiberius, a certain worker in metals appeared at the palace, and showed a beautiful cup made of a brilliant white metal that shone like silver. In presenting it to the Emperor, the artificer purposely dropped it. The goblet was so bruised by the fall that it seemed hopelessly injured; but the workman took his hammer, and, in the presence of the court, speedily repaired the damage. It was evident that the metal was not silver, although almost as brilliant. It was more durable and much lighter.

The Emperor, so runs the story, questioned the man, and learned that he had extracted the metal from an argillaceous earth—probably the clay known to modern chemists as alumina. Tiberius then asked if any one besides the worker knew of the process, and received the proud reply that the secret was known only to the speaker and to Jupiter.

The answer was fatal. The Emperor had reflected that if it were possible to obtain such a metal from so common a substance as clay, the value of gold and silver would be reduced, and he determined to avert such a catastrophe. He caused the workshops of the discoverer to be destroyed, and the luckless artificer himself to be decapitated, so that his secret might perish with him.

It is possible that the cruelty of Tiberius deprived the world for centuries of the use of the valuable metal, aluminum.

A Bangkok resident keeps a goose which acts as a watchdog. He has trained the bird to give a creditable imitation of a motor-car hooter whenever a stranger approaches.

Around the old Norman capital there are five great forest tracts. They contain game of various sorts, deer, and sometimes one hears rumors of bears, but whether this be true or not there are certainly some wild boars in the forest of Louviers. A boar-hunt is one of the prettiest, most picturesque sights in France, with its quaint dresses, its weird music, its remnants of Old World ceremonial. The cries of "vocelet" and "viaut," continuously heard during the hunt, are corruptions of "voilà ce l'est," "le voilà lahaut."

The servants are called by different names, bearing some reference to the sport, and they are all gorgeously dressed, especially the hornblower. The music of the horn plays an important part, for the different strains indicate what the hunted beast is doing. Whether he has taken to the open, whether he has gone to the water, when he is at bay, all is shown by the horns. The "halali tenante" is played when he tosses some of the hounds and runs off again; the second half of the "halali" shows that the boar is slain, and if he is a

"solitaire," a huge fellow who lives alone, his death is honored with the "royale fanfare."

Sometimes, when the beast attacks the hounds, the gentlemen dismount and prick him with their spears, to create a diversion. Then he will leave the dogs and rush at the hunters, and there is a general "sauve qui peut," for it is no joke to be wounded by the tusks of a wild boar.

A new phase of the art of modeling is practised by Mlle. Susan Meyer in Paris. The material employed by her is crumbs of bread colored with various liquids. She has discovered a process of making the mass elastic and almost unbreakable. A proof of her success is the purchase by the State of one of her works representing an apple-tree in full bloom. It is on exhibition at the Luxembourg Gallery.

The only Indian graveyard in the world where civilization and barbarism lie side by side in apparent friendliness is found in the Pacific Northwest. In this common burial ground are to be seen the graves of good chiefs, braves and squaws who were converted to the Christian faith. Their graves are of the conventional form and are decorated with crosses and tombstones. On the other side repose the unbaptized—the Indians who died unconverted. They were laid to rest on top of the ground and were dressed in full regalia, with war bonnet and paint.

This unique happy hunting-ground is one of the most interesting sights for tourists, and it never fails to call forth a query as to the hereafter of these red-skinned brothers, the believers and unbelievers, who have lain there so long. The cemetery is not large, but it shows that a goodly number of the dead had come under the influence of the missionaries before they passed away.

RIB TICKLERS.

Some people love quarrelling, no matter whether they have a cause or not. It reminds us of the man who, when asked by a friend why he had been fighting, said: "Well, that fellow said that my sister had a cross eye." "But, my dear fellow," said his friend, "you have no sister." "No," was the answer; "but it was for the principle of the thing I fought."

The cranky old bachelor was irritable. Calling the landlady, he said: "Miss Hashley, who is it that keeps singing, 'I Would Not Live Away?'" "That is the lady in the room across the hall, sir," answered the landlady. "Well," continued c. o. b., "kindly give her my compliments and tell her if she keeps that up much longer she can rest assured she won't."

"Now, wouldn't it be funny," said Popley, playfully, "if I were to become a little boy again?" "Mebbe it wouldn't be so funny for you, pa," replied his bright young son. "If you was to be littler'n me, pa, I think I'd square up a few things."

A duchess requiring a lady's maid had an interview with one to whom, after having examined her appearance, she said, "Of course, you will be able to dress my hair for me?" "Oh, yes," replied the girl; "it never takes me more than half an hour to dress a lady's hair." "Half an hour, my child!" exclaimed the duchess, in accents of terror, "and what on earth, then, should I be able to do with myself all the remainder of the morning?"

"Me father," said Mrs. Murphy, "always gits up whin a lady enthers the room." "The ould man is too suspicious," Mr. Murphy grunted. "I never seen the woman yit that 'ud be mane enough to hit ye when ye was sittin' down."

"How did your al fresco luncheon go?" "It would have been a great success if Chawlie Coddle hadn't spoiled it." "Dear me! How did he do that?" "By dropping out of his balloon and alighting on the table."

A SCOUT FAILS TO ACCOMPLISH HIS PURPOSE

By Alexander Armstrong.

On the 14th of April, 1867, I left Fort Hays, Kansas, to carry a note to the men at Lookout Station, nineteen miles away, telling them to beware of the Indians. The red devils had cut loose all along the Smoky Hill route, and were thirsting for blood. All the stage stations, with one or two exceptions, were prepared for Indian attacks—that is, each station was garrisoned by three men, armed with the best weapons, and the building was bullet-proof. As a further security the men dug for themselves a circular hole in the ground, covered it over with timbers and earth, and by firing from the loop-holes could stand off any number of Indians. This dugout had an underground passage from the stable, and was always stocked with water and food.

Lookout Station was one of the exceptions. Why a dugout had not been provided I don't now recollect, but it was because of this negligence that I was sent out from the fort. I was then in Government service as a scout, and was paid for carrying my scalp to any point convenient for the Indians to take it. Within fifty miles of Fort Hays there were at least 1,000 Sioux and Cheyennes on the warpath. Between the fort and Lookout Station I might encounter a hundred. On that day thirty warriors had come within five miles of the post, and indulged in yells of defiance.

I left the fort soon after dark, mounted on a genuine Mexican mustang and armed with a sixteen-shooter and a revolver. While the direct route was bad enough for any traveler, I had to plan for a worse one.

My only hope of getting through would be to avoid the traveled line. I got well away, and then took my bearings to keep a route about five miles to the left of the stage road. This would take me over some very bad pieces of country, but prudence commanded this policy. I knew when I set out that it would be all night in the saddle, as the ground would be too broken to permit of a fast pace, and up to midnight, when I had made a distance of ten miles in the right direction, the mustang had scarcely broken his walk. It came on pretty dark, with ugly clouds driving across the sky, and every few minutes there was a gust of wind which had a warning in it. While all my senses were keen and alert, I depended much on my horse. He had campaigned in Mexico, and would be the first to detect "signs." It was about midnight when he suddenly stopped dead still and threw up his head. That meant Indians.

The next minute was an hour long. Then came a gust of wind, singing and sighing over the barren plains, and it brought to my ear the footfalls of horses. They came from the direction I was headed, and would pass very near me. No two dangers have the same situation. It might have been a good plan to dismount and lead my animal to the right or the left. I judged it best to dismount and remain perfectly quiet. All men who have studied the Indian will tell you that his eye is quick to detect a moving object, and that his sense of hearing is wonderfully acute. Even in the darkness they might see us moving, and if the horse's foot struck a stone, the sound would certainly reach them. The company of the mustang was better than that of the oldest scout on the plains. I stood with one hand on his neck, and he was as firm as a rock. He realized the peril as fully as I did, and I believe he reasoned something like this:

"Those persons who are approaching are Indians. The slightest noise will betray us. We must remain perfectly quiet in hopes they will pass. If discovered, we will run for it."

In two minutes after receiving the first alarm the first Indian was up with us, and not over thirty feet away. They were not riding in single file, but by twos, threes, and fours, with the evident purpose of making as broad a trail as possible. I could see every pony and warrior, and every instant I expected to see some movement to prove that we were discovered. The ponies were on the walk, and there were forty-two Indians

in the band. I believe they were four or five minutes in passing, and during every second of this time, if my horse had lifted a foot, champed his bit, or flung his head, the sound would have betrayed us. It did not seem possible that we were thus to escape, and when the band had finally disappeared in the darkness, I was not certain but there was some trick behind it. I climbed softly into the saddle, and let the mustang pick his own way, and it was a full half hour before I was satisfied that we were not followed.

We soon got into a very bad spot, cut up in all directions with gullies and washouts, and our progress was slow. The mustang naturally picked out the best route, and about an hour before daylight I suddenly discovered that we were on the stage road. There were no coaches running then except at long intervals, when a strong escort could be had, while the Indians were riding over the route at all hours. I dared not travel it, but pulled off to the left again, and as a consequence daylight came while I was yet a mile and a half from the station. It was not yet fully light, and I was settling myself in the saddle for a gallop to the station, when I heard the yells of Indians in that direction. That settled it. They were there before me, and my peril was now far greater than that of the men I started out to save. They were three in number, and had the shelter of a stout log hut. I was alone and on the open plains.

To have pushed on meant the loss of my scalp; to attempt to return to Fort Hays meant the same thing. I had only a couple of minutes to think, and there was only one chance of escape. There was a big washout close at hand, and I led the mustang into it, and made him lie down. When I sat down beside him we were concealed from the sight of any one passing a quarter of a mile away, and there we must put in the day without food or water. I hadn't brought so much as a mouthful of meat with me, depending on reaching the station by daylight, and there wasn't a drop of water within a mile of us. We were scarcely settled down before the station was vigorously attacked, and I estimated the number of Indians to be not less than fifty. The three men were not surprised, though they had but slight warning. They were provided with sixteen-shooters and revolvers, and they returned the fire with vigor.

The Indians must have known that this station was not provided with a dugout, for they had come prepared to burn it. The forage for the stage horses had to be kept within, and its inflammable nature gave the savages a pointer to work on. It was an unfortunate thing, also, that the lay of the ground gave them cover to creep up within bow-shot. For three or four hours there was scarcely a lull in the firing, and during the time, as was afterward ascertained, four or five Indians were killed, and a still larger number wounded. When the redskins realized that the hut could be defended against their rifles they sent men forward with prepared arrows, and in the course of half an hour fired the building. Then their yells were terrific. I could have seen them by climbing to the edge of the washout, but I feared to leave the mustang alone.

The three men cooped up had no show whatever after the flames took hold. The Indians formed a circle about the station, and it was death within and without. It was expected that the men would rush forth when the heat became unbearable, and orders were issued to seek to take them alive.

A Dog Soldier or Cheyenne who was there told me afterward that it was planned to capture at least one of the three and save him for torture. The white men knew the fate in store for them, and they died game. They kept up their fire from the loop-holes as long as possible, and then yielded their lives to the flames rather than be taken. Their bodies were burned to a crisp. The wind blew the smoke toward me, and I could figure pretty closely on what was going on.

About noon the Indians prepared to retreat, and now a most curious thing happened. The mustang had been very quiet, lying on his side, and scarcely moving a leg. I sat by his head, knife in hand, and fully determined to cut his throat if he attempted to get up. I sat facing the west, and all at once heard the gallop of a horse. Next moment an Indian warrior appeared to view. He turned to the right to avoid the sink,

half encircled me, and disappeared in the east. I saw him look me full in the face, but he came and went so suddenly that I was dumb with astonishment. I supposed I was discovered, but the thud of his pony's feet grew fainter and finally died away in the east. With rifle in hand I crept to the top of the sink, and I could see the savage a mile away, riding to join a small band. I stood looking after him, head and shoulders above the sink, when seven other Indians, coming from the west, passed me not over twenty rods away.

My heart stood still for the moment, for it seemed that all were looking straight at me, but they galloped on after the others and left me undisturbed. Several years later I met the one who almost rode into the sink. His name was Man-Afraid-of-the-Water, and he assured me in the most solemn manner that I must have been dreaming, as he would have been certain to see even a rabbit in the washout. I also met one of the other warriors, and he had the politeness to hint that I must have been drunk. Still, everything happened just as I have described.

I gave the Indians an hour to get out of sight, and then abandoned the sink and rode down to the station. The house was still burning, and at that time, as I could see nothing of the men, I supposed they had been carried off. After I left several settlers reached the spot, found the bodies, and gave them burial. My mission was accomplished and my orders were to return to the fort. Between me and the post was a full band of bloodthirsty Indians, and an attempt at progress in the daytime was foolhardy.

I secured water for myself and the mustang, and then struck off to the north for a mile and descended into a dry gulch filled with sage brush. Here was pretty fair shelter if we lay close, but I had not been there five minutes when I discovered the corpses of four Indians, all still warm, who had been killed in the fight. No attempt had been made to bury them, but they were rolled under the bushes, legs straightened out, arms folded across the breast, and all their weapons left with them. In inspecting their rifles, which were new, I made the discovery that the maker of the weapons wanted to accommodate the savages without doing the white folks any particular injury. The front sights were so far out of true with the hind sights that no one could have hit a cow ten yards off. Each one of the Indians had received a ball in the breast, and each one was of middle age. I made a bundle of their weapons to carry to the fort, and although four corpses are not pleasant company to one in hiding, I was obliged to put up with them for the rest of the day.

Just before sunset seven Indians passed on the stage road going west, and from the terrific pace of their ponies I judged they were after reinforcements. As soon as night had fairly set in I led the mustang out of the ravine and mounted and set off, not daring to go near water for fear of an ambush. I planned to keep to the left of the road about a mile, and I got along without incident until about midnight. I was then riding at a lope, using eyes and ears to the best advantage, when the mustang suddenly stopped. It could mean only one thing. I slid out of the saddle and put my ear to the ground, and after a minute I heard human footsteps. They came from the east, and I knew they were made by a white man having boots or shoes on. I stood at the mustang's head, when out of the gloom of midnight a human figure walked directly up to us. I was satisfied that he was white, and uttered a hist! which halted him scarcely five feet away. He uttered a groan as he came to a stop, and I softly inquired:

"White or red?"

"White!" he eagerly answered.

"Then come on!"

It was a settler named George Robinson, whose wife and children had been butchered and his buildings burned. He himself had been wounded by Indian bullets in the hand and shoulder, and had been three days trying to get to Fort Hays. Pain and fright had so unnerved him that he had lost his bearings, and had the fort been only a mile away he would have missed it. He was suffering from hunger and thirst as well as his hurts. We soon found water in a hole, and I spent half an hour getting him in shape to ride. Then I took the lead and he followed on the mustang, and I kept a pace which

brought us to the post just after sunrise. We did not see nor hear anything to alarm us on the way. A fog came on just before daylight, and hung thickly over the country until after sunrise. We made the last three miles under cover of this fog, and as we reached the sentinel and were challenged the corporal who came hurrying up gasped out:

"Good heavens! But how did you do it?"

"What?"

"Why, there are two hundred redskins around us!"

The fog had no sooner lifted than the savages were seen riding about, taunting and defying us. We had come through their lines unharmed, never suspecting how close we were to capture and death.

◆◆◆◆◆

The members of the harem are still young slaves bought in Circassia, Georgia, Armenia, and other places, and practically educated in the harem itself on the chance that the Sultan may one day notice them, writes a Constantinople correspondent of a London paper. It appears also that civilization has not made great strides in the management of the royal harem, and that corporal punishments are still frequent, eunuchs, called "beating eunuchs," still being kept for refractory persons. Poisoned coffee is also not entirely out of fashion, while, grimmer still, the terrible sack flung into the Bosphorus even now does its sinister work. It is piteous to learn that, notwithstanding all this, many persons willingly sell children to supply the enormous colony which constitutes the harem.

The diamond has always been regarded as possessing one quality which placed it beyond rivalry, namely, that of hardness. There are several gems which compete with it in beauty, and at least one, the ruby, when of rare size and quality, outranks it in costliness. But none in the whole list equals it in hardness.

"Diamond cut diamond" has become a popular saying. The hardest steel cannot equal the diamond in that respect. The diamond, says the highest authority on the subject, a Government scientist at Washington, "is the hardest form of matter known."

But science advances, and if Nature has set aside for her kind of gems the distinction of unparalleled hardness, the art of man has not been equally considerate. There are at least two products of chemical experiment which have proved, according to the great French chemist, Henri Moissan, to be as hard as diamonds. These are produced from the rare metal, titanium. Moissan has succeeded in preparing titanium in the electric furnace. In the pure form it is harder than steel or quartz, and when combined with silicon or boron, so as to form a silicide or boride of titanium, it matches the diamond itself in hardness.

Titanium resembles tin in its chemical properties, and it is the characteristic element in the beautiful red and brown crystals of rutile. These, in the shape of needles, are sometimes found penetrating large white quartz crystals, forming gems that the French call "love's arrows."

Bismarck has more statues, perhaps, than any man who has ever lived. There are 204 of him in Germany and 34 more are to be built.

In Holland the Lombardy poplar is often used as a lightning-rod, and is planted near haystacks and isolated farm-houses. This poplar has the habit of growing nearly vertical, with the branches in an upright position; as soon as the rain falls the water runs along the branches and forms along the stem a constant stream of water from the top to the ground. When lightning strikes in the vicinity, the tree being the highest object has the best chance of being hit, and when the lightning strikes the tree it finds, in the stream of water which flows down the stem, a safe conductor toward the ground. Of course the stream goes seldom in a straight line, and at places where the limbs join together the flow of water often takes another direction. The limb may be doomed, but the haystack is saved.

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